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DANIEL HOFFMAN, SAMUEL HAZO, PHILIP BOOTH.

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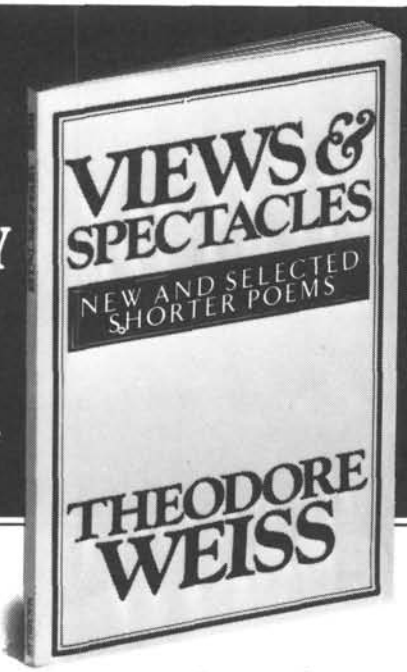

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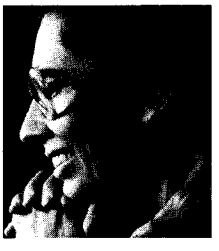

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and of COSMEP, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Subscription $12.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $13.00. Single copy $3.50. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, Inc., 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXXI available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXXI available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

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Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editors. The Editors are responsible for the entire contents of the magazine. THE HUDSON REVIEW does not have, and has never had, special "Poetry," "Fiction," "Articles," or "Book Review" editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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THE
Hudson Review

VOLUME XXXIII
NUMBER 1
SPRING 1980

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To Our Readers

The November 1979 issue of *Poetry* featured Allen Tate's poem, "The Swimmers," in a text reprinted from the last *Collected Poems* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), with, *en face*, reproductions of early MS. and typescript versions now among the Tate Papers in the collection at the Princeton University Library. No mention was made of the fact that "The Swimmers" was first published in THE HUDSON REVIEW (Vol. V, No. 4, Winter 1953), after having undergone many significant changes in the course of correspondence between Allen Tate and the Editors of this Review. We called this matter to the attention of the Editor of *Poetry*, suggesting that he publish a note of amplification; since he has chosen not to do so, we are running this note ourselves to complete the record.

New books by an Advisory Editor and a Contributing Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW have been published. In accordance with our policy, the books will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed below for the interest of our readers:

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD: *Lives of the Modern Poets.* Oxford University Press. $13.95.

JOHN SIMON: *Paradigms Lost: Essays on Literacy and Its Decline.* Clarkson N. Potter. $10.95.

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DANIEL HOFFMAN

High Society

"Toby's" in Cos Cob—faded mirrors, a smoked-wood bar
in an old roadhouse behind a row of trees,
still trading on the great ill fame
of those police raids year before.
Early, I sit at the table nearest the bandstand.
"Hey kid, better not let anybody
see ya drink that drink"—a great white
toothy smile, bulk of body heaving
in genial laughter, "or you'll spend
the night in jail," and the drummer tries
brushes on his snare. Cozy Cole
has talked to me! Now Art
Hodes puts his drink down carefully
in a coaster on the piano top and spreads
his left hand clear across a tenth, a twelfth,
riffles off some chords, as Max Kaminsky
—I'm a lot taller than he is—takes his seat,
warming the mouthpiece in one hand, the other
fingering the keys. Edmund Hall unpacks
his clarinet, fits the halves together, turns
the ridged nuts tightening his reed, then forms
his embouchure around the mouthpiece,
puts down the instrument and looks around,
sees me, transfixed to hear him play.
"Hiya kid, wasn't you at Nick's last Sat'day night?"
He remembers! Maybe he remembers
my telling him I'm trying to learn to play
like him . . . "Listen, kid,
before we start" (the somber room is still,
nearly empty under glum electric gaslamps)
"Lemme show you what you gotta know
if you're gonna play like me. D'ja ever
hear the Picou Chorus?" And now my heart's
a leaden fishweight. All those hours

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replaying stacks of records bought
from the jukebox depot for a quarter each
(I'd skimped for weeks on school lunch for the quarters),
my hoard of Bluebirds, red Vocallions, scratched Okehs,
discards from ginmills up and down the Post Road,
and I never heard the Picou Chorus
so look a dummy, knowing nothing, to Ed Hall.
"Yeah, Old Alphonse Picou's chorus
in 'High Society' like I learned it
off Leon Rapallo who played it just
like Alphonse Picou—He'd always play it,
even after he went off his nut
he'd play it all alone there in the bughouse
in N'Orleans. Somebody wants to play the clarinet
in N'Orleans, he's gotta play that chorus. At your age
I could do it pretty good. It goes
like this—"
Ed Hall raises his clarinet and bursts
into a wailing skipped descent of sound
and the empty saloon in Connecticut
blacks out—in a whorehouse on a riverboat
in Storeyville the grace notes tumble like a ball of glass
bouncing down a marble staircase, sharp and cracking
but not breaking quite. Filling the spaces
between his note-stream and the silence,
sizzle, sizzle, sizzle and a tump-a-tump-a
as bass and snare pace out the shifting rhythms
and now come piano chords like pilings running
out on the river beneath a pier that holds
a palace, and Kaminsky's
trumpet obligato, muted, open,
muted, weaves the pendant pattern
of its chandeliers of sound while Edmund Hall
is leaping upward, bouncing back up up those gleaming
stairwells higher, till his slurred vibrato's
whipping down the blues arpeggio
to a clear, humming lower register so pure
it would melt the forged iron padlocks on the heart
of the attendant at Louisiana State
Hospital where Leon Rapallo,

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brain gouged by syphilis, still plays
this chorus through the barred window
as the music floats off in a swirl
of motes dropping across a dusty road.
They run through High Society together, each
takes a riff in turn, bold flags
of different colors spearing off
from the onward repetition of the tune,
the tune ever changing as the jam-
session opens out in all directions
till they come back
acknowledging the single tune they
sprang from, now spring out anew, in different
riffs, new sharps, new blue notes, new returns,
by some invisible bond unspoken each attuned
to the knowledge that this chorus
is stop-and-go and hence the next to last
before the separate wills of clarinet and brasses
—Teagarden has joined them in the midst
of all of it and launched his sliding rough
caress of sound, his tiger's love-call romping
in the cellar under sweet suspended chords and
snaffled snares and rimshots' intuitions—all
coasting through the final chords
of High Society and reach
The End
They take a break,

laughing, wave to the applause of couples who've arrived
in Cords and rumbleseated roadsters,
youths in ice-cream flannels, yacht-club blazers, arms
around their silky girls with the white throats and low-cut
dresses,
thin wrists, the ivory cigarette-holders drooping
from long fingers—already
smashed, still in the Flaming Twenties
like the music, though it's September,
1939, and few
of us will likely make
such insouciant, plangent joy as this

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in the Forties or, if we get there,
in our forties although we spend
ourselves long times from now, trying
to remember
how it was, the Picou Chorus
and the other choruses
on shining instruments that plunge
against silence, quickening
in the illusion of their absolute
freedom the yoke of only four
chords and sixteen bars, borne
so gaily by Ed Hall,
Art Hodes, Cozy Cole, Max
and Jackson T. playing our hearts out,
each in his own way, together.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Dove sta memoria: In Italy

Dove sta memoria
till the stone eyes look again seaward
some minds take pleasure in counterpoint

—more talismanic fragments, to set beside "Pine-scent in snow-clearness." The book that contains them, *The Pisan Cantos*, I packed in my luggage on our first trip to Italy, 1951. The train passed through Pisa in an autumnal downpour. I looked out for the tower and caught not only that, but what the poem had prepared one for, standing apart from the mass of the cathedral: "a patch of the battistero all of a whiteness." The gloom scarcely muffled that whiteness and there was light enough to define the ribs of sharp, projecting stones that punctuate the conical dome and give it the spiky appearance of a sea-urchin.

That—*dove sta memoria*—lies the better part of thirty years away. For the past twenty I have experienced, practically daily, another sight which draws the threads together and sets counterpoint into motion—that line of houses, Wortley Terrace, where, when it had not yet spilled beyond itself, Wotton-under-Edge used to end. Sophie Brzeska, Henri Gaudier's companion, lived there after his death and before her removal to the Gloucester asylum. I had passed the house for ten years before I saw Gaudier's head of Pound as whitely commanding as that glimpse of Pisa, its stone eyes looking towards the mountains of the Upper Adige from the garden of his daughter's castle, Brunnenberg.

Pleasure in counterpoint? Pleasure or pain or both. The young Gaudier—but Gaudier was never not the young Gaudier: the Gaudier who had not yet touched marble used to climb the steps into Bristol Museum to sketch the stuffed animals. I work on the other side of the street and the reminder is always there.

The memory of that death is folded now in the memory of another, a later one. In 1974, going down from the exhibition, *Vorticism and Its Allies*, to the ground floor of the Hayward Gallery where the photographs of Diane Arbus were to be seen, I met Robert Lowell circulating this latter show in the opposite direction. We strolled out together and took tea beside the Thames.

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"You can see why she went mad," he said, referring to those pictures where nothing is ever quite right even in the most ordinary scenes, and where freakishness puts on such a daily face you could imagine it was the only possibility.

"What did you make of the vorticists?" I asked.

"Oh, pretty inhuman stuff."

I swallowed down argument, thinking of those early abstracts of Lewis, 1912 and 1913, where passion so declares itself, free of all effusiveness, it cannot but get itself mistaken for coldness.

"What about Gaudier?"

"Oh, Gaudier! Gaudier's another thing. Gaudier is marvellous."

It was Lowell's habit, whenever we met, to recall to me the time before. A decade had elapsed between our drive along the banks of the Charles River and our second meeting in Bristol. "Do you realise," he said on that occasion, "you are the same age now as I was then?" As we sat in the Thames-side cafeteria, he thought back to a charity reading we had both taken part in the previous year at the Skinners' Hall, in the London of Wren and the right worshipful city companies. "Curious place," said Lowell; "You just couldn't get a drink." I was puzzled, recalling the wine there—its plentifulness had made me fear that the Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables, on whose behalf we were present, would benefit little from our services. Why, even the waiters were drunk—and had been audibly drinking behind the scenes—by the time they came to serve the charity dinner, so that boiled potatoes were rolling in all directions under the feet of the guests. "You just couldn't get a drink." It was only afterwards I realised that what he had meant was spirits. He had said it with a curious, puzzled, tired little shake of the head. Quite the opposite of that sudden kindling of glance and face at his, "Gaudier is marvellous."

From the photograph of Gaudier at work on his bust of Pound one can see that he had previously envisaged the eyes as diamond-shaped lozenges. In changing these, together with a moustache which he had chalked in as possessing an upward curve, he not only removed a touch of melodrama of the kind which spoils the work of his older contemporary, Epstein, but realised a head worthy to, and capable of, looking at the blaze of the Ligurian Sea through its narrowed slits. It had stood facing that sea from Rapallo, a little further up the coast from the spot we had set out for in 1951. It was the same sea that had killed Shelley. Across the bay from which he sailed to his death—"our" bay—a piano had once been ferried in a rowing boat for Frieda Lawrence to play on in the

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Lawrences' pink, four-roomed cottage at Fiascherino. The two Englishmen, Shelley and Lawrence, stand incongruously side by side in the mural painting within the Albergo delle Palme at Lerici.

I had gone to work as a kind of secretary at a villa, Gli Scafari, between Lerici and Fiascherino. Its owner was growing blind. Henry James had once described him—the first editor of the master's letters—as "of long limbs and candid countenance." Of an age now with James when he had said that, Percy Lubbock was still a tall man and had grown corpulent. The candid countenance was veiled, complicated to read because of the eyes that floated directionless in the heavy features. He had a Jamesian bulk and one fancied at the time—perhaps it was no more than a fancy—that its slack, unmuscular pendulousness stood in the same relation to James the physical man as the style Lubbock had imitated to the master's own. His manners were of an unfailing smoothness, though a certain asperity would occasionally penetrate his voice, as when he reflected on the quality of the Berenson linen at I Tatti—"both the sheets and the table napkins so much coarser than our own here at Gli Scafari."

For the first three weeks we received nothing but kindness. To begin with, our meetings with him were few, since he was suffering from a cold and spent most of the time in his bedroom. His friend, Lady Dick Lauder, present as a house guest, was affable and absent-mindedly good-natured, and in the evenings, when we all met for dinner, there passed between the two of them a certain amount of political badinage. For he, as he described himself and as the regular arrival of *The New Statesman* bore witness, was "a bit of a Bevanite," while she, with more consistency, recognised that for her better times had gone—she now shared a house with her chauffeur—and had the frankness to regret their passing. One evening we realised that his teasing was directed at us. It was not political but one heard in it the old, ingrained, slightly querulous asperity. He had been legislating on the pronunciation of the English *a* as in "past" and "castle," insisting that it should be long also in "ants." Clearly he had not revisited the island for a long time, for even the English aristocracy would hesitate to lengthen the *a* of "ants." But what he was evidently indicating—as far, that is, as good manners permitted—was that our mildly Midland *a*'s sounded displeasing to him. But what of that? One could hardly feel wounded by a man who imagined "ants" should be pronounced "aunts."

Two weeks later I received my dismissal. It was most mysterious.

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Lubbock had returned to Florence with Lady Dick Lauder. The letter came from his step daughter, Iris Origo: he no longer wanted a secretary. Could one be dismissed for an accent? It hardly seemed plausible, but we could imagine no other cause for offence. We were penniless and homeless in a foreign country scarcely more than a month after our arrival. I saw myself back in England, once more teaching the recalcitrant children of Camden Town. However, thanks to the diplomacy and kindness of the Marchesa Origo, this didn't happen. We were removed to a *villino* adjoining the gardener's house and stayed there on a small allowance until the following May.

"Now do not forget," said Lubbock at his return, "you are still members of the same house party." This, too, was unintelligible, but he was as good as his word and would bring over his guests to see us.

The shock of dismissal, following on what seemed an escape from three years of teaching elementary school while trying to paint in the evenings, left me not only nonplussed but ill. I realised that I was worn out after three years of incessant work and fell all too easily into a state of increasing energylessness. The Italian doctor diagnosed heart strain. In the struggle back to normality I wrote most of the poems of *The Necklace* and had also begun visiting and drawing the sea-caves at the end of that long rocky headland from which Gli Scafari took its name. Those sea-caves and the islands visible beyond them have haunted my pictures ever since.

My books had found a home in the little room where the gardener's wife did the ironing for the villa—among them my treasured copy of the Sesame Books selection of Ezra Pound side by side with *The Pisan Cantos.* Both of these now spoke of a world which was close at hand:

> Lithe turning of water
> sinews of Poseidon,
> Black azure and hyaline,
> glass wave over Tyro . . .

This was the very sea and the light brought home now the exactness of that "glass wave" as one stood in the shadow of the sea-caves and watched the forming and re-forming of the waters. I hadn't at the time associated "till the stone eyes look again seaward" with Gaudier's bust, of which I knew nothing. The phrase

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had run together in my mind with the memory of Homer's "grey-eyed Athena" and also with Pope's "And laughing Ceres reassume the land." The line of Pope had even detached itself from its grammatical context so that "reassume" had dropped its syntactical (though not its prophetic) connection with "Another age shall see the golden ear / Imbrown the slope . . . / And laughing Ceres reassume the land." In the remembered line, "reassume" was some unfathomable tense, a subjunctive abiding its full implication until perhaps those stone eyes should again look seaward. The stone eyes were the eyes of a goddess, her statue and her temple restored to the height where the olive groves swept upwards from Fiascherino to La Serra, the village on the hill behind us. You knew the way the goddess moved when you saw the upright carriage of those women with bundles on their heads walking down the stony *salita* between the olives:

> . . . and from her manner of walking
> as had Anchises
> till the shrine be again white with marble
> till the stone eyes look again seaward . . .

The poem received its counterpoint every day and the scattered marble shone from the steps of the poorest houses, cheap in that part of the country, with Carrara at no great distance. Gianfranco Contini speaks slightingly of "the archaeological nature of Pound's Italy." Trust an urban intellectual to miss the point. It would be as foolish to label Pope's "laughing Ceres" archaeological.

A phrase that had defeated me in *The Pisan Cantos* long before I had reached Italy and used to puzzle out the book on the London tubes, read

> if they have not destroyed them
> with Galla's rest, and . . .

Part of a list of destructions, its continuation unfinished. But who was Galla? And why "Galla's rest"? Her remains or her repose or both? The answer arrived unexpectedly. Our real life now faced away from the villa towards the gardener and his wife and through their daughter and son-in-law to the high village above us, La Serra. We had heard there the story that Lawrence had been told when he came to Fiascherino in 1913. *In tempi antichi* when pirates

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still used to harry the coast, the next village, Tellaro, its church fronting the sea, was saved from attack by an octopus. An octopus? *Sì, Sì, un polpo.* Which had caught hold of the bell rope that had dropped its end down over the rocks. And so the village was woken up and rescued from the pirates who were about to raid it while everyone slept. In the version Lawrence heard, the pirates were missing and the people merely terrified by the inexplicable tolling of the bell.

We learned to walk up the *salita* to La Serra in pitch darkness to drink wine with friends—the family of the gardener's son-in-law. We would sit with tearful eyes in the smoke of a wood fire that used the room instead of the chimney for its flue. The wine was copious and one had to exercise a fearful control of the bladder—the serresi had made of this a fine art—because there was no water closet, and to ask to use the family bucket would have been a breach of good manners and would no doubt have overtaxed the bucket. So one went out at last into the black night and deliciously released a hissing stream among the olive trees, and then blindly felt out with the feet the stones of the abrupt *salita* in the direction of Gli Scafari.

To Gli Scafari came various relatives of the gardener's family to help with the olive harvest, rattling down the olives with long canes. At Easter, Tina, the gardener's wife, was due to visit her father and other relations at Bagnara on the great plain behind Ravenna, and she invited us to go with her. We reached there by train and by bus. We descended from the bus in the market square: the weather had remained extremely cold and the male population were still wearing their winter cloaks. Fifty cloaked and hatted figures turned instantaneously, or so it seemed, to watch us in total silence as we crossed the square—strangers and, what is more, foreigners. The front had passed this way, and the village had been blown up and now rebuilt. The question exercising those silent men was: "What nationality are they?" A couple of days later, as B. and I walked past a group of youths, one of them stage-whispered to the others, "He's a dirty German, but she's an Italian." "No," I said, facing them, "a dirty Englishman—*inglesaccio.*" But they weren't amused. However, no one knifed me.

We were lodged at the house of an aging widow, and slept in a large, warm bed—*un matrimoniale*—in a large, cold room. The bed was heated by a warming pan filled with hot ash. On the ample dresser stood a single photograph of a young woman. It was

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slightly unfocused and had turned brown. Buxom and evidently pretty-featured, she smiled out at the guests. "Your daughter?" I asked the owner of the house. "My daughter," she said. "She disappeared—*in tempo di guerra*." "Disappeared?" "One night armed men came here and took her away. She has never returned. I'm still waiting for her." "Armed men? You mean the Germans?" "No, not the Germans. Partisans."

The bus to Ravenna left early. Stars were still out and the North Italian plain with its leafless vine stocks waited in dejection for the sun. In Ravenna the puddles lay covered in a fine, wrinkling ice and as the light came back it brought with it not warmth but an aching clarity. We waited, penetrated by the intense chill, for the doors of San Vitale to open, wedging ourselves into the growing patches of sunlight. For San Vitale we had come prepared, as for—later that afternoon—Sant' Apollinare in Classe

Vieille usine désaffectée de Dieu

where the poet had assured us that we would still find

Dans ses pierres écroulantes la forme précise de Byzance.

What took us by surprise, after the hieratic splendours of Justinian and Theodora glistening in mosaic among the herons, ducks and moorhens of a leafy landscape, was the structure of brick immediately before San Vitale. The material had a simplicity and roughness that, like adobe, could have encompassed anything from a cowshed to a cathedral. The untidy, frosted grass among which it stood gave it the appearance of something distinctly rural, almost reassuringly shabby. This exterior kept the secret of what awaited within: the entire building was covered with mosaic—Christ among his flock of sheep, dressed not as a shepherd but as a beardless Roman soldier; the apostles; Saint Lawrence and, above them against the deep blue of arches and dome, mosaic stars, whose tiny cubes of glass and stone glittered down as sharply as the frosty stars under which we had taken our departure from Bagnara that morning. The light in there possessed an almost submarine phosphorescence and there seemed a touch of gold in it—

Di color d'oro, in che raggio traluce.

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Its source came from windows sheeted with wafers of alabaster: an illumination of glowing calm, the tempered light of a not quite arrived Italian spring, the sort of light the resurrecting dead might find easiest to awake in before they looked out once more at the full light of day. We had wandered almost by accident into "Galla's rest" and under the vault of which Louis Zukofsky was to write:

> . . . the eye can take in
> gold, green and blue:
>
> The gold that shines
> in the dark
> of Galla Placidia,
> the gold in the
>
> Round vault rug of stone
> that shows its
> pattern as well as the stars
> my love might want on her floor . . .

"Butterfly details to glint in his weightless structure," says Hugh Kenner; "Alertly seen, acknowledged, left in place, barely touched by being named, they pass down a firefly page like clavichord notes, freighted by no rhetoric of 'history.' " So lies Galla Placidia, or her now emptied sarcophagus, the history she lived through—captured by the Goths, married to their king, exchanged for corn, regent of the western empire—all subdued to this quiet luminosity, these stars "like a covey of partridges," as Pound says in another context. Once seen, the place was easily recognisable now, and, having read the great work in unchronological order, I finally came upon:

> Gold fades in the gloom
> Under the blue-black roof, Placidia's . . .

Archaeological? The experience of a diaphaneity that, lost, can be recovered. Brick pierced by an alabaster not merely marmoreal. Alabaster as a touchstone—for light. A structure by no means weightless invaded by its opposite or its complement. Brick and mosaic suffering a sea-change. La cathédrale engloutie. Not quite:

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a stay to outlast barbarities. For after Galla Placidia came Attila, burning down Italy in search of her daughter, Honoria, who in a pique with her lovers had offered herself to him.

On our return to the *villino,* Percy Lubbock brought a guest to tea one spring afternoon, a guest whose features I already knew from a photograph in the Penguin edition of *Howard's End.* There, in gloweringly unbecoming close-up, with wide-winged nostrils disapproving of some unidentified moral aroma, the face reminded me of a Staffordshire farmer I had known as a child and whose tart and usually exact tongue I had always feared. Once he dressed me down for swearing when I said, "What a blooming day," and the sense of injustice I nursed over the years always stung once more whenever I caught sight of that expression on the face of E. M. Forster.

"I want you to show Morgan some of your paintings," said my ex-employer.

Forster's contenance was mild in comparison with that photograph.

"I have a question I wish to put to you," he said. "It will keep till after we have seen the pictures, but I mustn't forget it."

I showed the paintings one by one. Forster seemed to be bored. Perhaps it was the unasked question that took his mind off these images which he examined so patiently and so absently. Lubbock was in a benign mood. I never knew just how much he could still see, but he made a show of examining the pictures himself, murmuring to Forster, "I say, what a fancy he has—what a fancy," and showing all the enthusiasm that the novelist so clearly lacked. I was never to comprehend the mysterious footing on which our relationship stood, or failed to stand. I could no more read his intentions than those of the two benign Chinese figures that graced his library with impassible porcelain faces, their hands hidden under wide draperies.

Before Forster left, we came to his question: "You have just been to Ravenna, I understand? Now, there is something there I have never seen and have always wanted to see—the mausoleum of Galla Placidia. What's it like?"

"It's a Poundian building."

"And what exactly is a Poundian building?"

So, almost thirty years ago, I attempted to describe haltingly the effect of that lucid darkness just as I have done now. I could hear myself making my inadequate explanation, realising, dawningly,

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in another part of my head, that the effect was one I had been half blindly stumbling towards in the scattered paintings that lay about the room, an effect it was to take another twenty years to begin to convey. Perhaps Forster had been right to be bored. I had a great way to go, and, if these scraps were only beginning to indicate the direction to me, what could they have possibly meant to him?

Before we left that May another meeting occurred—with the poet, Paolo Bertolani. He was then just twenty. He had had no regular job since he left school as a boy, yet all his pennies had gone into buying books. One he lent me, *L'Antologia di Spoon River*, came into late fame in Italy, largely, I imagine, because Cesare Pavese had written about it during that phase of Italian culture when an imagined America—for Pavese and his friends had never been there—seemed to offer an alternative to an Italy "estranged, barbarized, calcified," as Pavese wrote, an alternative, that is, where the mind might come into possession of itself despite the prevailing culture of Fascism. Thus, *The Spoon River Anthology* found its way to La Serra and still perhaps seemed to offer a literary model in a village where there was so much unarticulated life under one's windows—like the maid who, late in her pregnancy, aborted herself at the villa, flung her child from the cliff and continued to serve my ex-employer as if nothing had happened; or the cook who acquired a gun and tried to shoot the gardener; or the old, luxuriantly white-moustached peasant who offered a whole history of the modern world through his account of the growth and decline of *i baffi*, the moustache. He it was who, having found a dead eagle, carried it to the front of his house and spread out its wings against the wall. And when, as he said, his communist neighbours had asked what *that* was, he replied haughtily, *"È l'aquila imperiale."* "A chaste man," said Paolo. He never married and, having bought the land that had belonged to a local count, was known for the rest of his life as *Il Conte.* And there were those who *in tempo di guerra* had hidden in holes in the ground to avoid the conscription and now, like Paolo, were faced with the prospect of unemployment and looked to the communists—they had just won the elections hereabouts—to put things to rights.

Paolo showed me his poems—more human than political. I was struck by one phrase— "*una statua di musica*"—and I ventured to criticise another—"*deliziosi cipressi.*" I could see that the two words made a fine sound, but wasn't sure that "*deliziosi*," even if it carried

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more voluptuous overtones than our "delightful," quite earned its passage there. Paolo frowned a little. "Curious," he said, "it's been much admired by *una signorina* at Lerici, much admired." "But put it," I said, "beside *una statua di musica* and hear the difference." He wasn't quite convinced. The English youth ventured out more boldly: "Not Petrarch—Michelangelo, he's the man. See how he twists the language to his own uses. He would never say *deliziosi cipressi*. Petrarch might." There was a deep, deep silence, a wholly uninterpretable silence, in which (and this I did not learn for many years) Paolo was cogitating on the ignorance of his English contemporary who imaged that Michelangelo wrote poems, then deciding that *if* Michelangelo wrote poems, and he, an Italian, did not know this fact, silence was the only possible answer until he came upon some of them. Nor did either of us then realise that in the next town, Sarzana, on the plain beneath the hills where we were standing, another Italian poet had written in exile those lines that Pound translated, "Because no hope is left me, Ballatetta,/Of return to Tuscany," and that Eliot had transposed into a poem of his own, "Because I do not hope to turn again." Sarzana. *Dove*—in good time—*sta memoria.*

The final meeting with Paolo before our departure took place on the beach. He was leaning against an upturned boat and wore an immaculately white shirt between a blue sky and a purple sea. In his hand he carried a copy of Rimbaud in Italian—*Le illuminazioni.* Evidently he was travelling in the direction of *una statua di musica.* Or so I thought. But his path lay elsewhere. And it was not towards *i deliziosi cipressi* either. I imagined he would surely leave Liguria for Milan and on this assumption, venturing fifteen years later into a Fiascherino the tourists had ruined beyond repair and finding half our friends had gone as migrant workers to Germany, I failed to look for him at La Serra. He had never left the place. His Spoon River? Not exactly. His verse is more intricate than that and less moralistic. But the discovery of American literature, which was largely the work of Pavese and Vittorini, and which brought with it the desire for an accord with reality into Italian writing, remained as decisive for Paolo's art as, in a different way, the contact with America proved for my own.

Fifteen years . . . We returned with our two daughters, Justine and Juliet. We were in Siena—"the most civil city in Europe," as the friend who suggested it remarked. And so it is, its energies di-

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rected toward the yearly horse races for the banner of the Virgin, the *palio*, and its violences also. Pound had recalled the event in his Pisan captivity:

> and down there they have been having their Palio
> "Torre! Torre! Civetta!" . . .
> and the parade and the carrocchio and the flag-play
> and the tossing of the flags of the contrade

and he too had looked at the "four fat oxen" that pull the *carrocchio*

> having their arses wiped
> and in general being tidied up to serve god under my window.

He also knew the wells of the city and walked the steep walk up from Fontebranda to the vast church of San Domenico where the black, shrunken head of Saint Catherine of Siena is preserved,

> Narrow alabaster in sunlight, the windows of the cripta.

Had he experienced that other diaphaneity in the stones of Sant' Antimo, south of Siena, where blocks of—not alabaster, insisted the *custode*, but a local onyx—had been built into the walls to conduct a tawny, honied light into the nave of travertine? Onyx or alabaster, certainly not "that deep but dazzling darkness" of Galla's rest, but an intensity further along the scale of light conceived by the same sensibility which made possible

Di color d'oro, in che raggio traluce.

And, here, Dante is speaking of the paradisal stair—a Jacob's ladder of translucent solidity—which his own light could not follow out to its end. But, however far the monks of the abbey of Sant' Antimo had progressed along this stair, it soon vanished before them, and history, in the shape of the quarrels of ecclesiastic politics, transformed that place too into a

Vielle usine désaffectée de Dieu.

In that year, 1966, a number of coincidental forces had pointed us back to Italy—a parching thirst for the place, a return to its

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literature and two new correspondents. I had read *Il gattopardo* by Giuseppe di Lampedusa and went on to read the poems of his cousin, Lucio Piccolo di Calanovella, poems of an entropic history that can only consume, a history turning itself into fable where the Moorish predators of Sicily became "*la torma moresca dei venti*" (the Moorish band of the winds). I translated a number of his poems and exchanged letters with this strange man, an enthusiast for Hart Crane, who had, further, read all English poetry and, as an investigator of the occult, had been a correspondent of W. B. Yeats's: "In a lecture on myself," he wrote, "I have been called a poet of the dead. Very well. The spirits are more human than humans." An invitation came to visit him at Capo d'Orlando which I always regret I was never able to take up.

My second correspondent emerged after I had received through the post a small volume of poems, *Il Diapason*. The author was Mary de Rachewiltz, a name which concealed from me for some time that she was the daughter of Ezra Pound. Her letters displayed a diffidence about her own poetry and, after publishing a second book, *Di Riflesso*, she recognized with an unusual certainty that she had come to the end of the emotional need to write poems in Italian and produced, in English, that extraordinary book, *Discretions*, the story of her life and of her relationship with her father. Brunnenberg seemed a less exotically daunting place to reach from Siena than Capo d'Orlando, so on our return journey we availed ourselves of an invitation to stay there for a couple of nights.

As we drove through the Italian Tyrol, meeting tanks, lorries and armed men every few miles, we imagined manoeuvres must be taking place. We were mistaken. The army was out to protect the Italian minority after recent bomb outrages on the part of the Austro-Germans who had succeeded in killing a policeman called Vogler. Once we realised the situation, we could explain why in Trento, when I had asked an Italian policeman the way, and in that language, he had seemed on the point of embracing me, and why, when north of Merano I continued to ask in Italian for the turning to Brunnenberg, I was given totally false directions.

Mary came out to meet us in a light-blue dress, preceded by her slim and handsome children, Patrizia and Sigifredo Walter Igor Raimondo, both in their teens. Patrizia had recently returned from a stay with her grandfather, who had been shocked at the shortness of her skirt and also by the fact that she had been permitted to go and see Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper*.

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Below the castle, the cliff dropped sheer away and one imagined that bringing up children there must have presented similar hazards to the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, Colorado. But life at the castle seemed much like family life elsewhere and, though Boris de Rachewiltz was absent, there was a genial completeness in its atmosphere, one difference appearing in an inescapable awareness of the spiritual presence and history of Mary's father, and of the burden of deference due to him. We passed our stay in pleasant talk and in some local sight-seeing along the precipitous paths nearby—principally to Castel Tirolo, once the seat of Margarita Maultasch, Regent of the Tyrol in the mid-fourteenth century, the Ugly Duchess of Lion Feuchtwanger's novel and Lewis Carroll's imaginings. The Italian attendant there also appeared relieved when Mary addressed him in his own language and he sighingly lamented the worsening situation and the lot of his fellow nationals. On our walk back to Brunnenberg the subject of Lucio Piccolo arose. Mary told the story of the visit two Italian publishers had made to Capo d'Orlando. The Barone of Calanovella had received them, after their fourteen-hour train journey, with an effusive welcome and a portion of ice-cream.

Beside Mary's generosity, beside a certain insouciance—the typewriter she had given Juliet to play with "had belonged to Mr. Pound"—there appeared from time to time in that hint of a frown into which her concentration gathered, something of the tension with which a difficult destiny had strung her being. "A cultural orphan," Donald Davie was to call her in reviewing her memoir, *Discretions*; for the language in which she wrote that book was not the language she had learned to speak first—nor was Italian. A foster-child in the Tyrol, she had grown up using an Austrian dialect. She was now the Principessa, wife to a descendant of the Longobard kings. She was also Pound's daughter, and that, through war, through his sequestration and through the ultimate failure of the attempt to make a home for him at Brunnenberg, had left the deepest mark. "Do not take your father too literally—or too seriously." These were the words of Daniel Cory, Santayana's secretary and executor, who was also staying at the castle. His general air of mischievousness about Pound, the privilege of an old friend, served clearly as an attempt to take away the small, gathering frown from her eyes—the same frown that touches the face of Mary as a small girl on the cover photograph of her book. The presence beside her then, with tilted trilby, Bohemian cravat and

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energetic beard, still looked down at her from Guadier's profile on the wall at Brunnenberg.

Outside the window rose the Gaudier bust. The weather was misty. The peaks of the Ziel and Mut hovered invisible beyond the vines. Tourists trickled incessantly across the field path, a right of way for centuries, up to the castle gates. The gates had been placed there merely to prevent them from coagulating in the central courtyard. The bust seemed to attract to itself all the strength from the uncertain light. Whether one would *choose* to live with it . . . It asserted now, from its context within a family's history, the massive, male dominance of the image on which Gaudier had based it—Hoa-Haka-Nana-Ia, the giant Polynesian figure in the British Museum. "I have made a phallus of Ezra Pound," said Gaudier. Threatening progenitor, it loomed there starkly white, a single mass of thrust stone, the antithetical image to that side of Pound which responded to "Galla's rest," antithetical also to laughing Ceres.

I had been looking through the notebooks Gaudier kept when he was forming his style, notebooks full of figures evolved from Lautrec but simplified by the bold line drawn by a sculptor's hand. They must have dated from his Bristol days. It was dark outside. As I got up to return to our own room, I heard a cry and a metallic crash. B. coming down the unlit stone stair of the castle, carrying child and typewriter, had missed her footing. The choice of which to let go was no choice at all, and Pound's typewriter had gone bouncing to the foot of the steps to end up there buckled and quivering.

The Pound of Gaudier's bust was unlike the Pound I eventually met. This meeting took place, not at Brunnenberg, but at Spoleto in the following summer. Pound's hand felt cold to the touch. The hand of old age. It is strange to have met the innovators of one's time only when age had overtaken them. Except for Eliot—glimpsed at a London party, crossing the room with intent, beaked features, his movement unexpectedly predatory (or perhaps merely expressive of the concerted desire to escape as soon as possible), the large, butcher's hands clasped behind his back and the shoulders stooping forward into the trajectory of his intended flight. Pound's hand felt cold and, as one took it, returned no pressure. He seemed tired. It was evening. *Don Giovanni* would soon begin in the Teatro Nuovo at Spoleto and I had been introduced to him awkwardly across his companion, Olga Rudge. Mary had spoken to her

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mother of our visit to Brunnenberg, so conversation came easily. I enquired after Patrizia and Siegfried. "Siegfried?" she said; "One cannot possibly call anyone Siegfried at this date. It's the most absurd name imaginable. Why they gave it to Walter, I really can't understand." Walter was sanctified by Walther von der Vogelweide. Siegfried carried the ineradicable Wagnerian connotation. Miss Rudge, in any case, had no illusions that the romantic "Siegfried de Rachewiltz" would warrant suffering for in the great levelling down.

The first two acts of *Don Giovanni* followed, unvaryingly stolid. The sets by Henry Moore were also stolid—scarcely sets for *Don Giovanni*, simply sets by Henry Moore. The statue of the Commendatore in the final act—and this was where one hoped the sculptor's imagination would come into its own—turned out to be a paltry, plaster thing and the singing no better. During the interval I found myself, with Octavio and Marie-José Paz, in the bar of the theater. Suddenly Pound came in, Miss Rudge beside him. Photographers leapt forward. Flashes exploded. Pound looked confused, blinded, vulnerable. He stopped, blinking, shrunken in stature, unmistakably weary. His pallid fragility darted its helplessness in the same instant at Octavio and me, along with the memory of the great energy that he had stood for in both our minds. We, too, were made all at once vulnerable. Octavio slipped away to the far end of the room, silently mastering his feelings. "*Il est complètement bouleversé*," said Marie-José.

Five minutes later, catching sight of Miss Rudge, white-haired yet gaily volatile, eating pizza from a paper napkin at the bar while Pound waited beside her, one saw also the saddening disparity that a difference of not quite ten years will make to two people who have grown old together. But, then, Pound had been aged by more than just years.

After the 1967 Festival dei Due Mondi at Spoleto, I saw Pound once more. This was in Siena in 1970. Crossing the Piazza del Campo, I met Walter de Rachewiltz who was about to join his grandparents at the open-air café at one corner. It was the year of the Manson trial, the American phrases oddly disguised by the medium of the Italian newspapers. The trial comes back to mind because Miss Rudge explained that they had been that afternoon to see a rehearsal of Mercadante's opera, *Il Reggente*, adding that the characters in this piece of 1840s romanticism seemed more like Manson's "family" than *her* idea of royalty. B., who had been shop-

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ping in the same piazza, approached with the two girls, at which Pound rose to his feet, waiting for the ladies to take their seats before he resumed his own. He spoke only when Miss Rudge prodded him into a response—"Yes or no, Ezra?"—which would be followed by a single syllable from him of decided weight and clarity. But that was all. He sat concentratedly engaged in removing every particle of ice-cream from the bottom of his dish with a plastic spoon. Though once the conversation among the rest of us had taken fire and no one was looking at him, he began to examine each face with minute scrupulousness, losing not a word as he leaned forward, picking avidly at the skin on the palm of his left hand. A day later, I saw him, possessed of all the energy he had seemed to lack at Spoleto, climbing rapidly with springy steps the taxing upward gradient of that same sloping piazza. In the evening, he and Miss Rudge wandered past arm in arm, lost in their thoughts, and did not recognise us among the crowd of walkers: they were two old people slowly taking the air of an Italian August whose sultriness the afternoon's rain had freshened.

I told Walter, on our last day, that they had appeared very much at one, unperplexed by and perhaps unconscious of the many walkers along the Banchi di Sopra. With an admiring grandson's exaggeration he replied, "He's like Oedipus at Colonus." "He has his eyes still," I suggested. "His eyes," said Walter, "are not good now. Olga reads to him. The usual piles of books are sent to him." "So it's not worth burdening him with yet another one?" "Well, he tries to keep up, but probably not. He's eighty-five, you know." I asked whether Pound had ever known the abbey of Sant' Antimo, that so Poundian building. "Strange that you should ask," answered Walter; "We went there yesterday." We made our farewells, then Walter paused and said, "By the way, have you heard? Mauriac is dead."

A year before Pound's own death the publishing house of Mondadori put out a new literary miscellany, *Almanacco dello Specchio*. It contained Cantos 90 and 116 translated by Mary de Rachewiltz, who wrote: "Canto 116 can, up to the present moment, be considered the end of the Cantos. The voice is now almost a sigh, but the mind still shines out like a dolphin." One was in the company of other poet friends: Octavio Paz, Vittorio Sereni, with whom I had long corresponded, and—the realisation burst on one out of a twenty year silence—Paolo Bertolani. Both of us were represented by poems about the Ligurian coast and, more particularly,

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Fiascherino—I by one composed there all those years ago, he by one telling of its subsequent desecration. So he had continued to write, and in a style that was brusque, compact, fluid. I sent a letter and received in reply a book, a manuscript and his story of the intervening years.

His job was as rich in variety of human contact as—and rather more unexpected than—that of William Carlos Williams. He was a member of the police force—*vigile urbano*. There had been difficult years, years of depression, poems, part of a novel was due in *Nuovi Argomenti*. He was married, with two girls, and had never moved from La Serra. An article clipped from a newspaper reported a prize for verse that same year and carried a photograph. I did not immediately recognise the face, though I recognized the expression, a hard, almost pained concentration, the two sharp vertical lines between the eyes nicked in deep with shade. It was the expression he had worn that day on the beach as he stared seaward, a copy of *Le illuminazioni* in hand.

We exchanged letters—though Paolo is a reluctant if excellent letter-writer. He discovered from Vittorio Sereni, who coincidentally owned a holiday house nearby, that I had long ago written a poem called "Up at La Serra." This work was something of an embarrassment to me, for in it I had tried to imagine the life of a young poet "up at La Serra" who

> knew, at twenty
> all the deprivations such a place
> stored for the man
> who had no more to offer
> than a sheaf of verse
> in the style of Quasimodo . . .

I wrote the poem at a time when I was experimenting in the use of Williams' three ply cadences. It was the first of a series in which people are trapped by political or historic situations. Without La Serra—and without Williams—I might not have got them underway, so once more Italy and America had combined for me. By the seventies, however, and by the time I resumed contact with Paolo, I came to wonder whether I had not been tactless in using names—his name, in particular—and presumptuous, even, in venturing to imagine what had been in his mind in the 1950s. When, however, Paolo published a new volume, *Incertezza dei Bersagli*, in 1976, Vit-

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torio Sereni introduced it to an audience in Vicenza, in the presence of the poet, by reading his own translation of "Up at La Serra." Paolo's approval of that poem, " a sociological picture" as Sereni called it, made me feel that I could at least look him in the face. And this, before long, I did.

In *Incertezza dei Bersagli* there appears a poem entitled "La Casa di Charles"—the house, that is, where we had met in 1952. It records the alterations undergone by that landscape "of a severe grace," and it concludes:

> If you return do not
> return unless riding astride
> a sea-bird's back from some spot
> where even in flight the eye
> can't seize on this scape that men
> and the years have unshaped from the play that was life.

But his letters insisted, "*DOVETE tornare.*" And: "There are still here and there—especially at La Serra and La Rocchetta—places that keep their old substance." "Here (among the alleys, off the roadways invaded by *i prodotti Fiat*) there is a certain peace, an ancient silence. The houses are still those of time gone by with pots of basil in their narrow windows."

Coming back after twenty-five years to La Serra, I realised that Pound's choice of European exile and of this particular country—for it was not merely a régime he chose—had left its ponderable impression in the literate Italian mind. For no sooner had I sat down to drink the tea specially brewed for me by Sandro Bencini, Paolo's engineer friend with whom I was to stay, than our conversation turned to precisely that theme—Pound's involvement in Italy. Our talk wound its way to where, in England, it too frequently begins—Pound's political culpability: "Why, when he was part of the whole European effort towards coherence," said Paolo, "he should ever have fallen for—for *that* man." Paolo worked in a municipal building from the era of Fascism—one that sported a special balcony for speech-making by "that man" or his epigones. I advanced the usual explanations or half explanations: the Great War, when others had lost their equilibrium (Lawrence for example); the death of Gaudier—part of the death of that new renaissance of which he dreamed, the petering out of the great energy that was vorticism. But what I'd wanted to say was that I remem-

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bered a time, after the end of "that man," when you could read on the walls of Italy "*Viva* Stalin"—side by side, to be sure, with "*Viva* Rita Hayworth." And I remembered also those in my own country and the States who had trusted Stalin and gone on to be judicious about Pound. Let him that is without fault . . . In all our attempts to be judicious at his expense, we lack the generosity to wonder why an American should have so desperately thrown in his lot with Europe when he did. Donald Davie, reviewing the memoir by Mary de Rachewiltz, puts us to shame when he reflects of both Pound and Eliot: "[They] acknowledged in effect that, since they had got sustenance from European springs, it devolved upon them as a duty to declare their allegiance when the European centre fell apart. When we think what it meant to make such declarations (what it meant for Pound and what it cost him), the question whether they chose right is less significant than the fact that they chose at all."

Generosity declared itself when, a few days later, in a remote village in the Appenines, I met the poet, Attilio Bertolucci, an old enemy of "that man" and a diligent reader of literature in English. "It's all very well," he said, "for Contini to denigrate Pound's edition of Cavalcanti, but without Pound where would the revival of Cavalcanti be? What did the Italians *know* of Cavalcanti when Pound discovered him? Nothing. . . . And, now, I wonder if you would do me a favour? Would you be so kind as to read to me *Adlestrop* by your countryman Edward Thomas?"

One afternoon Vittorio Sereni drove up to La Serra from his house at Bocca di Magra, bringing with him the young Leopardi scholar, Fernando Bandini, and the critic, Giansiro Ferrata. Over a bottle of excellent wine from grapes grown on the land that had belonged to Il Conte, Ferrata told us two stories of Pound from the 1930s, both of which were new to me. The first concerned a buffet luncheon Pound had provided for literary friends in Florence, and his mounting annoyance as he watched them helping themselves to the cuts of chicken, until he could bear it no longer and burst out, "It's me who paid for this little feast and there they are helping themselves to all the drumsticks." The second story recalled the meeting between Pound and the idealist philosopher, Benedetto Croce. It had been difficult to arrange and, once arranged, the host was anxious about its outcome. Ferrata described the way the two great men approached each other, bowed, shook hands, transmitted signs of mutual approval and of how Pound pausingly,

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purringly, almost obsequiously began the conversation with: "You—you—are the author of the *Aesthetica?* It's beautiful—beautiful . . . but—but it doesn't work." "*Lei—lei—è l'autore dell' Aesthetica? È bella—bella . . . ma—ma non funziona*"—"*funziona*" pronounced, as was Pound's way with certain Italian words, with a strong French accent: "*ma non* fongziona."

Towards the end of the time at La Serra, as we looked out beyond Gli Scafari towards San Terenzo, the place of Shelley's stay, Paolo suddenly said to me: "In all my years of living here, I never once, you know, actually saw Lubbock until after he'd died."

"After he'd died? You mean you saw his ghost down there among the pines?"

"Not exactly his ghost, but it felt strange enough. It was one day in summer—a hot, summer morning as clear as a mirror, all blues and greens, brilliant. That day, in my rôle as *vigile urbano*, I had to go down to Fiascherino along with the health officer, the doctor who, because Lubbock's body was to be sent back to England, came to inject it with formalin as a preservative. It's a big injection—about a litre of liquid—in the region of the viscera, in the belly. Rather horrible. A kind of short-term mummification.

"We took the cliff-side path past the *villino*—I'd never been there since that time I came to see you and forever afterwards marvelled at the way the English eat so very delicately, so very fastidiously. We got to the villa—well, you know the place: right above the sea, just a stone's throw from the beach. As soon as we entered the room where the body lay, what struck me at once was the sheer mass of the dead man. So enormous that he seemed to fill the entire place. Even his face was enormous and very severe, with a decidedly contemptuous look, and it still expressed a very exact sense of security, of command. Yet, despite all that, everything suddenly collapsed into absolute fragility as I felt the great needle—I say felt, because I'd turned my eyes away—start penetrating his abdomen. And that feeling of fragility grew even stronger as I stood staring out of the window across the garden towards the sea, while the doctor was still going on with his endless injection: I could hear the unconcerned voices of morning bathers echoing up from the beach below.

"There I stood, looking through the window into the blaze of summer, when suddenly—very close, almost as though by stretching out a hand I could have touched them—I saw some field-mice leaping from one palm to another, and those lines of Montale from

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La Bufera came into my mind: '. . . *e il volo da trapezio/dei topi familiari da una palma/all' altra* . . . ' and I quoted them to the doctor—partly to communicate with somebody, and partly to absolve myself from that guilty literary thought coming at a moment like this; partly, also, because I knew of his keen interest in poetry. The reasons hardly added up. And the sense of discontinuity brought on another literary thought—Kafka—and the doctor murmured something about life continuing nevertheless out there despite the presence of this massive corpse, and despite all the other corpses; and he went on about the pure relativity of everything as he continued with his work. And the dead man, when you looked at him after that unforeseen intrusion of the everyday, and even of the banal, into the room and into *us*, the dead man was still enormous even in his fragility, although, as you might say, he no longer carried any weight, any significance. That was the first and only time I saw Lubbock."

With Lubbock's death, a last survival of James's Italy had gone too. For he, in his day, had married his American heiress, whom he had survived, to die in this villa of hers overlooking the sea that was Shelley's, Lawrence's, Pound's, Montale's, and now, for a given time, ours. When Paolo had finished speaking, we could hear beneath us, filtering upwards from between the hacked olive groves and the sea, the constant burden of accompaniment of summer Fiats as they circulated past a Gli Scafari overshadowed by hotels, in search of parking space along the once narrow road where the only sound had been the klaxon of the bus passing at morning and at evening.

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A. R. AMMONS

Distraction

During my glorious,
crazy years, I
went about the business of
the universe relentlessly,
inquired of goat
and zygote,
frill and floss,
touched, tasted,
prodded, and tested and as
it were kept the
whole thing going
by
central attention's
central node:

now, my anklebones hurt
when I stand up
or the mail truck
drops by to bury
me under two
small obligations: I
can't quite remember
what call I went to find
or why so much
fell to me: in fact,
sometimes
a whole green sunset
will wash dark
as if it could go
right by without me

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Design

The drop seeps whole
from boulder-lichen
or ledge moss and drops,

joining, to trickle,
run, fall, dash,
sprawl in held deeps,

to rush shallows, spill
thin through heights,
but then, edging,

to eddy aside, nothing
of all but nothing's
curl of motion spent.

Rapids

Fall's leaves are redder than
spring's flowers, have no pollen,
and also sometimes fly, as the wind
schools them out or down in shoals
or droves: though I
have not been here long, I can
look up at the sky at night and tell
how things are likely to go for
the next hundred million years:
the universe will probably not find
a way to vanish nor I
in all that time reappear.

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Feel like Traveling On

Sit down and be patient:
sure, it's a beautiful,
endless, lonely Sunday
afternoon: the old people
are in their graves:
the old places are deserted:
the times of all those
times, faces, flavors
a few minds left hold:
sure, ahead the chief
business is tearing the rest
of the way loose: but by
the empty, take the full:
sit down, find something
to read: a grand possibility
was made: who knows
what became of it.

Spruce Woods

It's so still
today that a
dipping bough means
a squirrel
has gone through

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Night Finding

Open and naked under the big snow
the hill cemetery by the falls
looks felled to stump stone

and the rich spray of the summer
falls gathers absent into
glazes of ice wall: here in the

backyard thicket sway-floats
of honeysucklebush brush
(once misted berry red)

bend down to solid touch,
and weed clumps break off
into halfway teepees:

pheasant in the earliest pearl
of dusk bluster in, swirls of
landing and looking, and settled

to the dusk mode, walk under
the snow slants and shelters easing
through brush fox would noticeably jar.

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JEFFERSON HUNTER

Three Versions of Peter's Denial

I

From the moment Jesus and his disciples begin the final journey to Jerusalem the Gospels speak less of messianic power than of human failing. In Luke's version of the passion narrative the disciples fail to understand Jesus when, not for the first time, he tells them the Son of Man is to be mocked and killed; they are perhaps too conscious of miracles they have seen enacted, of dangerous Pharisaic questions wittily evaded, to believe in the coming degradation. Or a sense of special privilege keeps them from understanding the need for sacrifice: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, beg unbecomingly for prominent places in the Kingdom of Heaven and must be rebuked, while at the Last Supper, again according to Luke, the Twelve break into a jealous dispute over precedence. On the Mount of Olives the more forgiveable failure is of the flesh. The three most beloved of his followers are unable to stay awake and watch with Jesus, even at his express command and even when, momentarily fearful, he is himself most human and most in need of human companionship. Moments later, after Jesus' arrest, one of his followers strikes with a sword at the High Priest's servant, as if to assert devotion with a violent and useless gesture.

The culmination of this series of petty desertions might be thought to be the betrayal of Jesus to the authorities. But Judas' act is different in kind from other failures in the Gospels, because it is essential without being in any real sense explicable. The Evangelists write of a bribe of thirty silver pieces, of Satan's entering into Judas—perfunctory attempts to supply motives for a betrayal which cannot be understood except as a preliminary to Christ's sacrifice. Judas, about whom we know nothing and need to know nothing, betrays his master so that the Scriptures may be fulfilled.

About a later and more representative failure, Peter's denial, there is no similar sense of final purpose and no mystery. It need not have happened and it is entirely understandable. Like other

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studies of weakness in the New Testament it allows us an escape from the austere realm of Jesus' teachings—the saintly hopes for human perfectability, the apocalyptic certainties, the parables which in clarifying life radically simplify it—by invoking an altogether more familiar world in which men quarrel nastily over trifles and fall asleep at a crisis, in which righteousness is rewarded inconsistently if at all, and in which even the most faithful deny what they believe when asked threatening questions in the dark. And in which, it should be added, the immediate consequence of remorse is not forgiveness but bitter weeping.

The episode begins with a bit of boasting natural enough in one who has been regularly favored among the disciples and symbolically renamed Cephas, Peter, the Rock. "Everyone else may fall away on your account," he says to Jesus, "but I never will" (Matthew 26:33), and to the future keeper of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus replies, "I tell you, tonight before the cock crows you will disown me three times." (The translation is that of the *New English Bible*.) Peter disbelievingly or stubbornly reiterates his determination to go to prison and death rather than deny Jesus. He has contradicted his master before: impulsively taking Jesus by the arm, he rebuked him for predicting his own crucifixion and resurrection, so earning himself a reprimand (Matthew 16:23); and he has deliberately tested himself before, asking Jesus to bid him walk on the water of the Sea of Galilee. On that occasion (Matthew 14:28–33) he felt fear, and failed. Now, after the catastrophe of Jesus' arrest, Peter's impulsive will takes him, alone among all the disciples, to the house of the High Priest, where he will be able to see the end of it all. He follows the crowd "at a distance."

Jesus meets the questions of Caiaphas first with dignified silence and then with the admission that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the admission being direct in Mark, riddling in Matthew and Luke. Meanwhile a quieter interrogation is going on in the courtyard outside. Peter is sitting by the fire, and in its light his face is revealed to a servant-girl, who—idly, because she has nothing else to do in the empty hours of the night?—comments that Peter was with Jesus the Galilean. "I do not know what you mean," he responds, and goes out to the gateway to think about Jesus' fate in private or to escape the consequences of telling the truth. The attempt to get away quietly does not succeed. The same servant-girl or another tells the bystanders that Peter was with Jesus of Nazareth, so he must protest more forcibly that he does not know the

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man, adding an oath this time. But now his dialect is giving him away, "betraying" him in ironically retributive fashion. The bystanders tell him, angrily perhaps, having been contradicted, that he is a Galilean and a follower of Jesus. Peter breaks into curses and for the third time makes formal denial: "I do not know the man." At that moment, while he is still speaking, a cock crows, and—in a detail given only by Luke, the most sentimental of the Evangelists—Jesus suddenly turns from the inner courtyard to look at his disciple. Peter remembers Jesus' words to him and goes out, weeping bitterly. With that weeping the episode ends.

What literary achievement does this narrative represent? In the best brief commentary on Peter's denial, that given in *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach remarks that the Gospel account differs from narratives in Petronius and Tacitus by ignoring the antique rule of differentiated styles, low for comedy and high for tragedy, the two to be kept rigidly apart. Consequently Peter's denial fits into no antique genre: he is a problematic, tragic figure described in the minutely observant, realistic mode a Latin author would have reserved for rustic, comic slave, or *nouveau riche*. Auerbach's conclusion is that the Gospels democratize literature, which before their example could not have conveyed moral significance in an ex-fisherman's encounter with serving-girls and off-duty soldiers, and so could not have been a suitable vehicle for a religion teaching universal love and urging poverty. Peter's denial is indeed innovative, even subversive in setting. But what is most remarkable about the episode is the skill with which the innovativeness is established—the setting described, the atmosphere deftly and economically conveyed. The denial has the qualities and gives the satisfactions of a consciously shaped work of art. It is more moving than anything in Petronius and Tacitus because all its elements contrive the reader's sympathetic identification with Peter, and more moving than other episodes in the Gospels because it is better told. It is understated. It is highly dramatic. It is exactly as long as it needs to be. Above all, it makes effective use of apparently minor details, these being of a sort rarely encountered elsewhere in the New Testament.

These details are neither random and mystifying, like the nakedness of the unidentified young man who slips away from the scene of Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:51–52) or the message Jesus writes in the dust when he is asked to judge the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53–8:11), nor patterned and symbolic, like the feasts, lamps, and

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vineyards of the parables. The apostle's Galilean accent, the minutely reported movements, the fire, Jesus' look—these become expressive as the episode proceeds to its conclusion, in that reciprocal process we are familiar with from later realistic narratives: accumulating details create a scene, and the scene, once apprehended as a whole, reveals further significance in individual details. The fire burning in the courtyard, for instance, which has no meaning in itself and might have been left out, draws the characters of the scene together into a circle of companionship on a dark night. To this circle the outsider Peter comes when he is unwilling or unable to follow Jesus into Caiaphas' house, and from it he is banished when he denies his most beloved companion, the banishment being, like the compulsively embraced punishments of Dante's *Inferno*, both penalty for and symbolic enactment of his sin. So too the triple accusation of Peter, which initially seems required only because the New Testament so often puts things in threes, heightens suspense because each accusation develops from what precedes it. (The questions put to Peter, and his answers, vary slightly among the Synoptic Gospels, but the sequence in each is effective in the same way.) Note the quite different impression made by Christ's triple prayer to his Father on the Mount of Olives; there the close repetitions lead to no climax, suggest a superhuman strength of will, and celebrate a fixed divine plan of sacrifice. The one detail of Peter's story determined by something outside the story is the cock-crow. That this sound and not another pricks Peter's conscience might have been foreseen by a reading of Mark 13:35–36 ("Keep awake, then, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming. Evening or midnight, cock-crow or early dawn—if he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep"), and yet even it fits into the scene with perfect naturalness.

There can be few interpretative problems about Peter's denial. We know too much about him and see too clearly what he does to be puzzled by the act itself. Why the act is reported is a more interesting question. What contribution does a conspicuous failure make to the hortatory message of the Gospels? Is it part of that darkening mood which surrounds the final events of Jesus' life, like the disturbing last parables, the prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction, the near riots, the earthquake? Is it a case history, rather too intense in presentation, distinguishing between the remorse of Peter (which leads to repentance) and the despair of Judas (which leads to suicide)? Is it simply the narration of an event which hap-

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pened and had to be recorded, perhaps at the instigation of Peter himself, whatever it reveals about his character, because no detail of the most important event in the history of mankind could be lost? Is it, in spite of Auerbach's warning that the denial cannot be fitted into a system of judgments operating with static categories, a lesson against spiritual *hybris*, or simply a demonstration of the sinfulness of Man? An interpretation more persistent than these holds that Peter fails so that the mercy of God may be extended even to those who fail, so that the gravest of sins may be shown to be forgiveable. The dark words of Matthew 10:33 are after all not made to apply ("Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven"), and Peter, his faith recovered after his works fail, is privileged to see the risen Christ first of all the disciples and earns again his name as Rock of the Church.

Some such view has apparently satisfied most readers, since in the long history of Scriptural interpretation the episode has neither provoked ingenuities of scholastic exegesis nor stimulated heresies. The denial has, however, invited artistic treatment, which is as searching a form of interpretation as any other, though more disguised and often more idiosyncratic. Those who take Peter as a subject for their art have rarely had a theological purpose; for them, the denial touches only peripherally on ideas of God's mercy or the eventual victories of an apostolic career, however much and however conventionally they may believe in these ideas. Instead, they re-create over and over again Peter's denial as a single, distinct moment valuable because it sets limits to their work while allowing them freely to change details and emphases: the original narrative remains, a strong framework, beneath infinitely varied additions and elaborations. (No one has been able to make the story simpler than it is in the Gospels.) With their versions of Peter's denial they express meanings determined by the circumstances of their creative life, the requirements of the forms in which they work, and their willingness to acknowledge the inevitability of human failure.

II

There are relatively few paintings by well-known artists of Peter's denial: a fresco by Duccio, a perhaps unfinished and probably damaged oil by Georges de La Tour, an unsuccessful canvas by Benjamin West. The scarcity of treatment may result from more-

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than-ordinary difficulties of translation from narrative to image. That is, the story in the Gospels, like all narratives, is temporal in essence. It proceeds from point to point sequentially, and though it has a climax, that climax does not symbolize the meaning of the whole but only culminates it. A painting (or a statue, as Lessing pointed out two hundred years ago in the famous essay on the Laocoön) is a work of spatial art which is "read" all at once, or nearly so, and which can show sequence, cause-and-effect, only by indirect means. Some narratives are more suited to pictorial representation than others, however, because their sequences may without too much distortion be collapsed into a final scene. Paintings of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and there must be several thousands of them, dispense with the preliminaries and show the only image which matters: the father with the knife, the son struggling in his grasp, the interrupting angel, and the ram conveniently caught by his horns in a nearby thicket. In the story of Peter's denial divine manifestation is replaced by a series of human actions, all of which must be shown or implied if the episode is to have its full meanings.

When in 1660 Rembrandt came to paint the denial he might have avoided the problem entirely by substituting characterization for narrative, as Goya and Ribera were later to do in studies of St. Peter Repentant, or as he himself had done in an etching of 1645. The magnificent painting of Bathsheba with King David's letter (1654) shows that Rembrandt might well have succeeded in bringing a sense of time and so an implied narrative into a mere portrait of Peter, for the Bathsheba painting depicts the present moment of her bath, the immediate past of the letter from David in her hand, and the future suggested by her sorrowful and accepting glance. But Rembrandt was more ambitious in his planning for Peter's denial; his evident goal was a treatment of the episode in which cause should be as prominent as effect, and hence he had to paint exactly the right moment of the story.

The finished work, which now hangs in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, shows a serving-girl examining Peter's face by candlelight—Rembrandt's substitution for the firelight mentioned in two of the Gospels. The maid's gesturing hand shields the viewer from the direct glare of the flame and reflects added light back onto Peter's robes, which leave only his face and left hand visible. Peter's lips are beginning to form a denial—the third?—and his hand is starting a gesture of ignorance or negation. In the left foreground

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are two soldiers in armor. The one on the far left, who is standing, is merely sketched, his coarse figures peeping out obscurely from beneath a helmet too large for him. The soldier on the right, whose armor gleams in the candlelight, has taken off his helmet to drink from a large water-bottle but sits arrested in thought, staring past Peter as if suspicious of something he has heard—the Galilean accent—rather than seen. In the right background another soldier leads Jesus off to interrogation. Jesus turns his head over his shoulder to look at Peter. This complex group of figures is held together by symmetrical placement around the candle at the center, by a horizontal line of faces (the standing soldier's, the maid's, Peter's, Jesus'), and by a strong triangle of hands (the seated soldier's, the maid's, Peter's) which forms a parallelogram when extended to include Jesus' face. The background, in other words, is made to engage intimately with the foreground, as in the original narrative the background of Peter's boasting is made to engage intimately with the foreground of his denial by the link of the cock-crow. (In a drawing of the denial now in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Rembrandt included a crowing cock, but for the painting he wisely substituted the purely visual detail, taken from Luke, of Jesus' glance at Peter.)

These devices of composition preserve the moment just before Peter commits himself irretrievably to lying, which is the moment of greatest drama. He is just on the point of being identified as a follower of Jesus, just on the point of denying he knows the man, and just on the point of seeing Jesus look at him in reproach—or in philosophical acceptance or in forgiveness; the background is too dark to allow us to judge Jesus' expression. The progress of events is stopped just long enough to allow the viewer the illusion that Peter can reconsider. For a moment it is possible to believe that the episode need not proceed to its conclusion, and then knowledge of the outcome asserts itself and in the mind's eye Peter completes his denial, as he must. Rembrandt relies here on the psychological truth that the mind can best grasp the inevitability of events when it has had time to explore and dismiss other outcomes; the truly disturbing photograph of an accident, for example, is that which shows not the final results but a moment seconds earlier when it has not yet happened, when it might not happen.

What might not happen in Rembrandt's painting is the fall of a giant. Peter quite literally dominates the canvas: he is taller and more massive than anyone else, his robes, catching the candlelight,

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are the major source of illumination, and his face, though showing signs of fear and incipient shame, is still in command of his emotions. He controls the action, barely, and seems proud of doing so. A Greek artist might have treated this pride as a necessary condition for a tragic fall and so made Peter a figure of heroic ignorance, an Oedipus or Agamemnon still unaware how little he knows himself. Rembrandt detected such ignorance in Peter, and painted it, but as a Christian he had also to view Peter's pride as a sin, and to expose it by such artistic means as the emphasis given to Peter's robes, which, a little too magnificent for the situation and indeed for his role as follower of Jesus, hint at a weakness that needs covering up. For such a moralization of the episode Rembrandt could have found a text, had he needed one, in the teachings of one of the splinter Protestant groups of seventeenth-century Holland, the Mennonite sect, which we know to have influenced his religious life. Menno Simons, the founder of the sect, treats Peter with undisguised scorn as he puts the story of the disciple's failure to homiletic use: "O God! there lay the confident, bold Peter, the firm rock, now broken . . . Behold, so altogether little, poor, miserable, ill, and impotent is that man (especially in great need) who is not strengthened by the Spirit of God."

The final impression given by the painting is nevertheless not of narrow Mennonite disapproval. Rembrandt is interested in the background of sin, in the atmosphere which surrounds it, not just in its exposure. Here his diagnosis, which is no more than hinted at, is that Peter's sinful pride defends him against advancing age. In the painting Peter is a patriarch who has grown old without having grown wise, and he is placed between the serving-girl and a conspicuously youthful Jesus so that they may seem to condemn him with their youth alone. That impression, of course, tends to exonerate Peter; he is no more responsible for his years than the soldiers are responsible for their elaborately impressive armor, which looks like the symbolic discarded armor of a *vanitas* still-life and is clearly put in the painting to indicate the pointlessness of action.

None of these things is in an iconographic tradition or the Bible. What is their source but the artist's life? In 1660 Rembrandt was fifty-four years old. He had passed through a dignified form of bankruptcy four years earlier, in an attempt to placate creditors and preserve an inheritance for his son Titus, and had witnessed the sale by auction of paintings by himself and others, portfolios of etchings and drawings, and the extensive collection of weapons, cu-

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rios, musical instruments, and medals which had been both stock for sale and token of financial success. At the end of 1660, probably, he moved from the grand house on the St. Antonisbreestraat, purchased at the height of his prosperity in 1639, to a smaller dwelling on the Rozengracht, in the lower-class Jordaan district of Amsterdam. At the same time he became an employee of the picture-dealing firm set up by Titus and Hendrickje Stoffels, who bore a daughter to Rembrandt but could not marry him because of a provision in the will of his deceased wife Saskia. Whatever Rembrandt felt upon becoming the titular dependent of his son and mistress, the arrangement at least permitted him to continue his work relatively untroubled by debts.

At this difficult period Rembrandt was not forgotten and not without purchasers or pupils, and though he used himself as a subject many times (there are eight self-portraits between 1657 and 1661), he also undertook commissioned portraits and large-scale historical and Biblical paintings in which heroic action plays a part. Yet it is not mere sentiment about Rembrandt's financial ruin which sees in the paintings of the late '50s and early '60s a growing interest in introspection and the themes to which it invariably leads: fallibility, defeat, and the passing of youth. The themes are there in the paint. The face given to us by the self-portraits is lined and unillusioned, enduring rather than hopeful, while the rich costumes painted so lovingly throughout Rembrandt's career now seem to dwarf their wearers or make them imposters. In two treatments of the Esther story, for example, the "Haman and Ahasuerus at the Feast of Esther" in Moscow and the "Disgrace of Haman" in Leningrad, Haman's lavish Oriental costumery—especially his magnificent turban—only makes obvious the self-pitying inadequacy of his face. Haman is a victim of false grandeur no less than Rembrandt's Prodigal Son, in rags and barefoot, is a victim of prodigality or Rembrandt's Peter a victim of self-deception.

Peter does not have Rembrandt's features but is nonetheless a creation of the inward searching which produced the great self-portraits, and like the subject of the self-portraits he is painted with sympathy and scrupulous honesty, never condemned outright and never quite forgiven. He has every excuse for his act of denial, and yet the sense of loss arising from it—what a noble act of faith might this Peter have made!—is so overwhelming as to make excuses useless. He cannot satisfy a moral sense working with static

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categories, and for that reason perhaps is moving, more moving than a simple, edifying Peter (a broken, weeping one, for instance) could be. He reveals a fallibility not to be avoided by spiritual modesty, atoned for by tears, or prevented, whatever Menno Simons would argue, by reliance on the Spirit of God. Peter's case comments without histrionics or sentimentality on the ordinary defeats of life, such as growing old, losing courage, and betraying inner strengths, which the fifty-four year old Rembrandt, the bankrupt, the widower, the employee of Titus and Hendrickje, must have felt keenly, and about which, he knew, there was nothing to be done.

III

The passion narrative was first shaped by eyewitnesses to the event, then preserved in several oral traditions, then written down and eventually canonized with the rest of the Gospels, then recited on the days of Holy Week to congregations no longer able to read Scripture, and finally acted, either in liturgical performances inside the church or, more realistically, in fully staged and costumed mystery plays. By the late Middle Ages men might once again be eyewitnesses to the passion, and though they could not participate in it as actively as in other ritual repetitions of the Church, such as Baptism or the Eucharist, they could at least watch with Jesus in the garden, despise his betrayer, and vicariously suffer his crucifixion and death.

In time a hybrid form evolved from sacred drama and the chanting of the passion story during Holy Week. This was the sung Passion, which at first was dramatic only in assigning roles to different singers: a tenor might take the part of the Evangelist, a bass that of Jesus, an alto that of the crowd or *turba* and several other minor parts as well (such an arrangement of voices eventually became standard). The music was plainsong, the unharmonized and unaccompanied modal chant of the ancient Church, and the language in which the Passion was sung was Latin. Changes in the Passion came with the development of Western music over the centuries. The crowd's speeches were set polyphonically for increased verisimilitude and dramatic effect, and the minor parts were distributed among several singers, so Pilate and Caiaphas sounded forth as basses, the serving-maids of Peter's story as sopranos. The organ was used for a simple accompaniment, later being aug-

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mented by continuo instruments and finally a full orchestra. Plainsong was gradually transformed into recitative, a flexible medium for the rapid declaiming of text—which after the Reformation might be in the vernacular and so particularly in need of an expressive vehicle. The Scriptural text was extended by opening and closing choruses (usually a simple introduction and a brief moralizing conclusion), by congregational hymns (or chorales), and by devotional arias for soloists. All these changes, in force by 1700 at the latest, permitted composers to put the full resources of their music at the service of the narrative—to make it clearer, more dramatic, and more telling. The chorales, for instance, provided welcome pauses during performance, while the arias helped to direct or focus congregational emotions.

This was the situation inherited by Bach. In 1723 he composed a Passion according to St. John as the first major undertaking of his new post as Cantor, or Musical Director, of St. Thomas and four other churches in Leipzig. This deeply conservative city, where the Passion had been sung in plainchant as late as two years before Bach's appointment, would scarcely have accepted elaborations to the Passion being tried out elsewhere in Germany, but in any case Bach's inclination was not to set to music one of the new rhymed paraphrases of the Gospel but the old text as traditionally augmented; to write Passion music which would sustain the momentum of the original narrative, preserve its essential simplicity, and yet include the lyrical commentary demanded by his and his listeners' religious emotions. In setting Peter's denial, for example, Bach's task was to make the episode morally intelligible without lessening its drama, and to do so as concisely as possible, not delaying the larger story for this one example of failure, and not allowing himself the musical expansiveness Handel, for one, enjoyed when he set the rhymed Passion paraphrase of B. H. Brockes, in which Peter's copious remorse requires three recitatives and three arias for its full expression.

In the St. John Passion Peter sings only six words—the phrase "*ich bin's nicht*" twice—because John's version of the story only allows him so much speech, and because in Bach's scheme lyrical meditation is the duty not of actors in the Passion but of witnesses to it, witnesses who have centuries of Christian teaching to aid them and who, following a doctrine at the heart of Protestantism, are enjoined to scrutinize the Bible for direct clues to living a Christian life, converting simple actions to metaphors (and *vice*

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versa) in the process. Accordingly, after the narrative of No. 12 in the St. John Passion, in which the Evangelist sings of Simon Peter and another disciple following Jesus to the house of Caiaphas,[1] No. 13 is an aria on the text "*Ich folge dir gleichfalls mit freudigen Schritten*" (I too follow you with eager footsteps). The aria, sung by a soprano (a boy soprano in the original performance) and accompanied by a nimble flute *obbligato*, sounds childish and is meant to sound childish. It affirms a simple faith in man's ability to follow the Messiah and therefore in Peter: like Peter, the soloist sings ("*gleichfalls*"), I will follow you . . .

No. 14 continues the narrative, first describing Peter's standing outside by the fire, his being questioned by the maid, his denial, and his retreat back to the fire, then interrupting Peter's story (as in John, of course) for the questioning of Jesus by the priests, which ends in Jesus' being struck by their servants and his measured rebuke: "If I spoke amiss, state it in evidence; if I spoke well, why strike me?" (18:23). The following chorale, "*Wer hat dich so geschlagen?*" (Who has struck you?), a communal rebuke to the servants, is kept from self-righteousness by Bach's unassertive harmonization and by the text's insistence that only Jesus knows nothing of evil deeds; all men are sinners. Peter, as we have begun to see, is a man. In No. 16 he is again warming himself by the fire (an ornament on the word "*wärmete*" echoes the same word similarly set in No. 14, linking the two recitatives together), and he is immediately accosted by the choral outburst "*Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer?*" (Are you not one of his disciples?). This is a typical *turba* chorus: short, derisive, and quick. Peter's answer is to sing "*ich bin's nicht*" again, and then the Evangelist finishes the story: the final accusation and the final denial, the crowing of the cock, and Peter's remembering Jesus' words and weeping (this detail, which is not in John, Bach borrowed from Matthew, forgetting that John also omits Jesus' prediction that Peter would fail him).

The musical treatment of the cock-crow is restrained—Spitta, Bach's biographer, tells us that a Passion in Schleswig featured a musician hidden behind the organ, who imitated a cock-crow on an oboe-pipe as realistically as possible, to the delight of the audience—but Bach's setting of the words "*und weinete bitterlich*" (and wept bitterly) is an elaborate chromatic melisma, an outpouring of grief leading finally to a cadence in F sharp minor and a tenor aria

[1] The Synoptic Gospels do not mention the other disciple.

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in the same key: "*Ach, mein Sinn, wo willt du endlich hin?*" (O my mind, where can you escape?). The aria is restless, even jagged in rhythm, and full of awkward leaps. Though it admirably expresses a shame at being human and therefore treacherous it needs to give way to something less desperate; namely, to the chorale "*Petrus der nicht denkt zurück,*" which moralizes on Peter in an appropriately forthright harmonization and ends with a reassuring cadence in A major: "Peter, who does not remember, denies his God; but at the first glance he weeps bitterly. Jesus, glance also at me, whenever I will not repent; whenever I have done evil, stir my conscience." The detail of the glance comes from Luke, not John, but the chorale is otherwise a fitting conclusion to Peter's denial and Part I of the St. John Passion, the whole purpose of which is to give meaning to suffering. Christ suffers so that he shall be fully glorified; Peter suffers so that he shall know his sinfulness, so that the congregation in turn will learn from his example. Peter is to the congregation's conscience as the cock-crow (or Jesus' glance) is to Peter; his failure is of use.

The second of Bach's surviving Passions was performed for the first time on Good Friday of 1729. Matthew's passion account is much fuller than John's, and in setting Matthew Bach allowed himself a few more musical resources—a double chorus, for example, and the well-known "halo" of strings which surrounds Jesus' recitatives. But enumerating these changes and others does not begin to account for the intensification of mood, the perfection of musical effect, which characterizes the St. Matthew Passion as a whole and its treatment of Peter's denial in particular. "*Petrus aber sass draussen im Palast,*" the Evangelist begins: Peter is sitting in the courtyard of the High Priest's palace, and to him the maid makes her accusation in a rising interrogative line. Peter does not understand. A second maid accuses him, and he responds "*ich kenne des Menschen nicht*" (I do not know the man). Then a chorus, shorter even than its analogue in the St. John Passion, spits out the crowd's accusation, at the same time mocking Peter's accent by an exuberant tenor roulade on the word "*Sprache*" (speech).

Up to this point Bach has deliberately sought different sonorities; the soprano of the maids contrasts with the Evangelist's tenor and Peter's baritone, and individual musical lines follow their own logic, forming no pattern. Now, for the end of the story, Bach concentrates his effects. Only Peter and the Evangelist sing, and the ascending minor-sixth phrase with which Peter makes his third de-

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nial is repeated exactly, a fifth higher, by the Evangelist's "*Und alsbald krähete der Hahn*" (and immediately the cock crew). Indeed, if the Evangelist's part is notated in the tenor clef of the original score rather than the treble clef of modern editions, the two lines look exactly alike on the page; such visual symbolism is highly characteristic of Bach, who elsewhere does not hesitate to write crossing melodic lines in crucifixion choruses or bury obscure numerological signs in his orchestration. After announcing the cock-crow—and in this Passion we have heard it predicted by Jesus, so that Peter's memory has something explicit to grasp—the Evangelist concludes with the most difficult line of recitative he will have to sing in the entire work: "*Und ging heraus, und weinete bitterlich*" (and he went out and wept bitterly). He goes up to a sustained high B on "*heraus,*" then down on "*weinete bitterlich*" in a delicate chromatic passage of extraordinary and unanalyzable beauty. It is less obviously imitative of weeping than the longer phrase of the St. John, and yet conveys the idea of weeping, and the ideas of loneliness and exposure, more poignantly.

An alto aria follows, "*Erbarme dich, mein Gott.*"[2] Both the instrumental introduction and the voice part begin with an ascending minor sixth, so the aria is musically linked with the denial; it refers to it textually by repeating over and over again the word "*Zähren,*" tears: "Have mercy on me, my God, for my tears' sake; look here, heart and eye weep before you." "For my tears' sake" is the key phrase, as though suffering alone, and not the remorse of which it is evidence, merited forgiveness. But neither forgiveness nor remorse is really at issue here. The singer and through her, vicariously, the congregation are rehearsing Peter's sorrow in a formalized representation of weeping; they are imitating Peter and in the process overcoming the awkward grief of witnessing his failure from the outside. Further identification with the apostle comes in the succeeding chorale, "*Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen,*" a simple harmonization of what must be the simplest confessional text in the Lutheran hymnal: "Though I have left you, I shall return; with his sorrow and pain of death your Son has recompensed us. I do not deny the guilt, but your grace and favor are much greater than the sin I ever find in me."

That is how the episode ends. Peter's denial is not made useful, as it is in the St. John Passion, because somehow the appropriate

[2] The aria texts in the St. Matthew Passion were written by "Picander": Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700–1764).

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moral lessons have already been learned. The conscience is awake, sin is admitted, and the devout listener can claim a superiority to Peter only in a humble and decorous pun ("I do not deny the guilt"). The St. Matthew Passion is not a very didactic work. Unlike its predecessor, it is less concerned with what Peter's denial and Christ's suffering mean than with the emotional results of the denial and suffering, and especially with possible consolations for them. Consolations, not cures or vindications, for neither Peter's recovery nor Christ's resurrection is mentioned. The joy of Easter Sunday is kept apart from the sorrow of Good Friday. The devout are consoled for Christ as they might be for the death of any man, by celebrations which turn helpless grief into mourning and raw facts into tolerable symbols. "*Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen; sehet den Bräutigam, seht ihn als wie ein Lamm*"; so the opening chorus begins (Come, you daughters, help me mourn; see the bridegroom, see him as a lamb). There is no comparable symbolization for the moral failure of Peter, no way of turning it into something preordained and necessary, but it is at least translated into music capable of arousing, formalizing, and finally releasing the emotions associated with the denial: simple disappointment, shame, anger, sympathy, and above all sorrow, since in Bach's handling sorrow at Peter's failure merges indistinguishably with the greater sorrow of Christ's suffering. The music and words of the St. Matthew Passion, like funeral obsequies or the elaborate machinery of a Requiem mass, relieve suffering by indulging it as fully and as beautifully as possible.

IV

In 1894 a Russian doctor was vacationing in a seaside resort. He rose at ten to enjoy the signs of spring, such as trees in blossom, young ladies pining for sensation, and weather warm and sunny enough for him to sell his old fox-fur coat. The gooseberries were not yet ripe but there was much else to eat (he dearly loved to eat): mutton pies, cabbage soup with spinach, confections, chops with kasha. The last he took in company with the directress of the girls' school. The local gentry were putting on *Faust*, and in the evenings he stopped by rehearsals to listen to the singing. There were few other amusements. The doctor found the people around him lackluster and dreary, and as he was suffering from palpitations of the heart, a severe cough, and hemorrhoids, he was frequently uncom-

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fortable. He went to bed at ten. Towards the end of his stay he wrote letters to friends describing what he had been doing—he was bored, it was all a mistake, he wished he had had the money to go to Paris—but barely mentioning the racking cough which had driven him to the resort in the first place, and saying nothing at all about the short story he had written some time during his month's stay. The story was one of several hundred tales, sketches, anecdotes, jokes, and parodies he had written, starting at the age of twenty, to support his family and put himself through medical school, publishing them under the names A Man without a Spleen, . . . v, A Prosaic Poet, Starling, The Brother of My Brother, A. Ch., Antosha Chekhonte, and finally, when he had greater leisure to write and more literary ambition, Anton Chekhov.

The story Chekhov wrote at "ever so boring Yalta" is called "The Student." It begins, typically, with the description of a single figure in a landscape: the seminary student Ivan Velikopolsky is coming home from hunting on a spring evening. (I quote and paraphrase from the translation of Robert Payne in *The Image of Chekhov* [New York: Knopf, 1973]). The weather has been fine, but the wind rises, needles of ice stretch across pools, and suddenly it is winter again. The student sees the earth in agony around him and thinks of his barren home: it is Good Friday and no food has been cooked. Oppressed by hunger and cold, he decides in despair that nothing has changed since the days of Rurik and Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. Always this wind has blown, always there have been wretchedness, ignorance, and desolation.

The student sees a wood fire burning in the gardens belonging to two widows, Vasilissa and Lukerya, who are mother and daughter. The two women have just finished supper; Lukerya is washing spoons; men's voices drift in from the river, where they are watering horses. With a brief greeting the student joins the women around their fire and immediately begins a monologue suggested by his studies, the season, and the surroundings: "On just such a cold night as this St. Peter warmed himself by a fire," he begins, stretching his own hands over the flames, and he goes on to tell the whole story, beginning with the agony in the garden and Peter's failure to keep awake. When he speaks of Peter following Jesus to the house of the High Priest, and seeing his master being beaten there, Lukerya drops her spoons and looks fixedly at him. He goes on with the narrative: the courtyard, the waiting, the questions, the denials, the cock-crow, Peter's weeping. So the student imag-

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ines it: the garden very still and dark, and in the silence the sound of muffled sobbing.

Vasilissa is now weeping and her daughter's face is flushed and straining, as though with pain. The farm workers come back from the river and the student says good-night. Going off, he thinks of Vasilissa's tears. If she and her daughter have been moved by something that happened nineteen centuries ago, he argues to himself, then the old episode still has meaning for the two widows, for the present, and for himself. His soul is suddenly filled with joy. "The past," he thinks, "is linked to the present by an unbroken chain of events all flowing from one to the other . . . " The same truth and the same beauty that reigned over humankind in the garden and in the courtyard of the High Priest have endured uninterruptedly to the present time. As the student crosses the river and climbs the hill to his home he is filled with feelings of youth, health, and vigor—he is only twenty-two, Chekhov adds—and life suddenly seems to him ravishing, marvelous, and full of lofty meaning.

Why did Chekhov pick Peter's denial for the tale within his tale? Any Biblical episode, one imagines, might have made Lukerya stare and Vasilissa weep, and so prompted the student's joy, but only this one was so perfectly suited to the dark setting and the dark mood of the opening of the story, when spring seems to have been betrayed by winter. The story is built, in fact, on a series of parallels between the one night-time occurrence and the other. On a cold Good Friday Peter and Ivan Velikopolsky, outsiders both, approach a fire in search of companionship; it is an empty hour when nothing is happening; there is some talk among common people; and there is weeping. Ivan is a would-be preacher ready to turn any chance circumstance to practical use, and as he begins his monologue he himself notes the simplest of these coincidences, the cold night and the fire, but he fails to realize how many of the outward appearances fit, how much his encounter with the two women is a re-enactment of Peter's story, not just a recital of it. Both Ivan and Peter are simultaneously self-centered and ignorant about themselves, the ignorance being symbolized in Peter's case by his repeated denials of his true identity and exemplified in Ivan's by his innocent joy at "discovering" something his despair has already taught him: the sameness of human life over the ages. At the beginning of the story he feels the wind blowing from the days of Ivan the Terrible with weary persistence; at the end, in an

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emotional reinterpretation of the same idea, he thinks of the past being linked to the present by an unbroken chain of fellow-feeling; but there is no substantive change. Ivan's joy is the result of an accident of mood and hence it is a fragile thing. He is only twenty-two. How many years will he have to change his mind? When will he feel the cold wind blowing again?

Ivan's innocence does not occasion cynicism or cutting irony, as it might in a comparable story by Maupassant or the later, fabular Tolstoy, because Chekhov is uninterested in the devaluation of one mood by another—of hope by disillusion, say, or steadfast faith by momentary cowardice. What interests him is the cause-and-effect of emotional change, or the sheer drama of change itself, as in the 1890 story "Gusev," which without explanation juxtaposes two starkly contrasting events, the burial at sea of an old sailor dead of tuberculosis, whose shroud is delicately opened by a nosing shark, and a magnificent, triumphal sunset in colors "for which there are scarcely any names in the tongue of man"; or in "Typhus," a yet earlier tale minutely describing a soldier's illness, his surges of animal joy on recovery, which even the death of a sister who has lovingly nursed him cannot overcome, and his final giving way to the weariness of daily life and a sense of irreparable loss when he looks at a gray spring sky and listens to the rattle of old iron rails being carried away in a cart. Chekhov the doctor is in evidence here: observing but not judging, showing compassion when he has no other treatment.

In later life Chekhov told Ivan Bunin that "The Student" was his favorite among all his stories, and he described it to his brother Ivan as a manifesto for optimism, or at least a rebuttal to those who found his work gloomy and misanthropic. The first of these statements is unchallengeable, the second understandable but misleading. The student's joy is no less valuable for being unmediated and fragile—nothing in Chekhov's tone diminishes it—but joy is balanced, qualified, by the despair of the beginning, so that the story as a whole suggests the variability of human moods rather than any pattern of optimism. What may have made "The Student" so exemplary to its author is something else: a subtle and indirect lesson about companionship. Ivan leaves the women's fire and goes about his business, but not before he has come closer to them than he knows. Peter weeps, Vasilissa and Lukerya weep, Ivan rejoices: all are joined in a complex human response to an act of separation, of betrayal. For a moment Ivan ceases to be an out-

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sider. Modestly or ignorantly, he fails to understand what has happened; he thinks the women are moved because their souls are affected by what happens in Peter's soul, not because he has been able to tell the story well, but he is wrong. He has told the story well, as touchingly and nearly as sparely as it is told in the Gospels. The link between Vasilissa and the distant past is himself, the narrator, and if he could admit that narrative skill he could make explicit what Chekhov only implies: that the past and present are linked by a chain of human fashioning. Everything in the story, and especially the choice of Peter's denial, demonstrates that there would be no past without a narrator to transmit it—without a Chekhov to put the past in an expressive setting and arrange for its eloquent retelling. A more conventional artist would have described Ivan's joy as a near-automatic response to something joyous in Scripture, some miracle or victory over adversities; Chekhov derives it from a study in failure.

In looking at Peter's denial Chekhov saw a quality far simpler than the pride about to be defeated by life which Rembrandt painted, or the sense of loss which Bach's music attempts to palliate. He saw the ability to feel, to weep in the darkness. That is scarcely an interpretation, one admits—it is an artistic assessment. We may imagine Chekhov asking himself, what truth or beauty belongs to this sordid betrayal? Only the truth of self-knowledge and the beauty of pure, unrestrained, useless emotion. Self-knowledge and pure emotion are the ends to which Chekhov's stories tend, and consequently the writing of "The Student" may have followed easily from the decision not to moralize, not to console, but simply to isolate feeling and dramatize its transformations. We do not in fact know if Chekhov, during his stay in Room 39 of the Hotel Russia, wrote the story as casually and quickly as he wrote most of his work, or with difficulty, in a struggle against his illness, the distractions of spring, and the nagging fear of artistic failure. We know only that he did write it, and that his version of Peter's denial, in a process which the Evangelists could not have foreseen, but which every artist hopes his work will embody, makes a temporary failure into a temporary joy.

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SAMUEL HAZO

Sexes

She or someone like her woke
the wasps in David's, Caesar's,
Casanova's brain.
Stung,
the loins took over, and the plot
outgrew the musk behind her
yawning kiss, the heft in hand
of either breast, the muted
thumps of bellies in a bed.
Later, the truths . . .
That she
exclaims what she thinks
when she thinks it.
That she
proclaims all photographs unflattering.
That what she lacks in looks
she compensates with furs,
colognes, low lights and gems.
By then David as king
forgets his first inseminations
and composes psalms of some
merit.
Caesar remembers
Cleopatra in the way old generals
recall an older battle's
oldest wound.
And Casanova
at his memoirs dreams each night
all night of what was once
better than caviar and more available.

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Leafing

Bagged and burned, they turn
into the only smoke that's worth
the tasting.
Woods revert
to wood as I, their janitor,
rake up the year.
Cleansed,
cleansed to my tree of bones
and savoring the blown tobacco
of November, I recall Chateaubriand's,
"Forests precede civilizations,
and deserts follow them."
Disturbing comments for a ballpoint
era where psychiatry's the state
religion, and the prize of prizes
is a champagne shampoo
in the locker room.
My woods
are far from forests, but I know
real deserts when I see them.
So, I work my bonewood rake,
leafing for reasons to repudiate
Chateaubriand.
The answer's
in the trees.
Shorn to their shells,
they'll wait the winter out
and start all over when
the time is right.
By then
the desert's prize and predecessors
will have gone the way of smoke.
As long as there's a leaf, there's hope.

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RICHARD WERTIME

The Paper Boy

I BEGAN DELIVERING PAPERS at the age of seven. I was too young for the job—too young for any job, really, other than that of being seven—but as luck would have it the paper I worked for didn't care. It was as green as I was. A fledgling daily, Arlington's only, it was struggling to make inroads on the big Washington papers which dominated even the suburbs, though without giving the suburbs the attention they deserved. Or so the paper I worked for hoped. And it was taking a sensible gamble; Arlington wasn't very well covered by the *Post* or the *Evening Star*, or, back then, the *Times Herald*, which the *Post* absorbed soon after.

But my paper, the *Arlington Daily*, got off to a rough start, and I didn't help ease its pain. My first day on the job bewildered me. I'd been assigned to a route which covered a tangle of hilly streets facing out toward the Pentagon. These are streets which even now I find impossible to decipher; the apartment numbers break rank, play curious arithmetical tricks; and it seemed to me at seven that the whole concatenation of streets, buildings, shrubs and fence-railings that my route was meant to encompass was a cruelly shifting maze designed to undo my senses. I'm overstating this. I had an acute sense, that evening, that the fault lay with me; that my mysterious inability to correlate actual dwellings with the separate pink slips which two steel rings held together indicated my unreadiness for this job, any job. But my parents had "put themselves out," as they would have said, to secure this opportunity for me; and so, as the afternoon wore on, wore into evening, into night, I plodded up and down the concrete steps connecting terraces in the hope of proving myself. To no avail: my back hurt, my feet ached, my eyes stung. Humiliated, I went home, where my mother very gently reassured me that I had tried. Armed with my older brother's help, she went out to finish my papers for me. They returned at 10 p.m. My mother was red from the cold. "Buck, it's no wonder you couldn't do that route!" she said. Until this decisive moment I'd withheld my shame manfully; but now, on seeing the half-full bag, my mother as dashed as I had been, and even my brother John wearied, I let my defenses down and cried.

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The next day, my mother called the paper and explained. To my surprise and regret they were very understanding: they offered me a route in another part of our neighborhood. I accepted it. But still, though I could manage pretty well now, I found it difficult to uphold my end of the bargain with consistency. More often than not, my childishness would get the better of me, and I would loiter somewhere until it was shamefully late in the day before I set out to do my route. There were many complaints. Much of the problem lay with me. But it was also partly the paper: it was so meager at times, was such a slender, pitiable scrap, that I was half ashamed to deliver it. And after the first several weeks my clients dwindled with cruel persistence from an initial sum of fifty down to the abysmal figure of seven. Seven: one fewer than the number of pages the *Daily* usually had on Tuesdays. I soon learned why: the paper had mounted a great push to secure its initial subscribers, and it had offered a first month at reduced rates as a come-on. As soon as this month was over the customers dropped away like flies.

But it wasn't very long before another campaign involving a second cut-rate offer swelled again my clientele; and so, in this see-saw fashion—I extending erratic service, the paper faltering, then recovering—we limped along, the *Daily* and I, for about two years. I don't remember how our association came to an end. The separation wasn't painful, I remember that much, and a short time later I had a route with the fated *Times Herald*. It may well be that I relinquished the *Arlington Daily* because I already had this new route lined up.

I greatly liked the *Herald*; it was a real, a Washington paper, with decent bulk and abundant funnies, and a front page carrying the news of the world. Its demise was, for me, a first experience with failure of the purely impersonal kind. I recall the day our manager told us the paper was going to merge. "Well, boys, that's it," he said, and added, smiling, "for all of us." We stood there huddled on the chilly piece of sidewalk where our corded bundles of papers were dropped every morning. Our manager was a compact, balding, middle-aged man with an underplayed manner; he seemed to understand that this was something we couldn't entirely grasp. "But it isn't *fair*," I wanted to say, on behalf of the whole group. I said, of course, nothing—there wasn't anything to be said—and two weeks later I was jobless.

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I entered a transition. I took piecemeal jobs. I made application to a number of papers, hoping to get, like my brother, a morning route with the *Washington Post.* But that was not to be. I got a route with the *Evening Star.* And it was a good route, all in all: I started out with fifty customers, and in the years I delivered the *Star,* I rarely had fewer, or many more. I had found my niche. I was issued a crisp new bag whose stiff white muslin would in time become as limber as old jeans and grey with sediments of newsprint. I had a special wire-cutter which I carried in my pocket. Whereas my manager on the *Herald* had driven his own Ford station wagon, my new boss drove a truck with *The Evening Star* emblazoned across it in bold, ten-inch Gothic letters. The Wednesday papers were extra thick because of all the advertising, and we had inserts on Sunday, a morning edition. There's a particular smell that fresh newspapers have: it's slightly spicy, slightly acrid, and it's a smell that goes dead if the papers get wet. I recall minor things from my days as a newsboy: some people who were nice to me in extraordinary ways; the swell of bundled papers when the wire was first clipped; my sickly sinking feeling when a customer moved off suddenly and left me poorer by several dollars.

And I remember one night, a winter night that was bitter cold, when both my father and my mother helped me and John deliver our papers. Snow lay about to the depth of a foot and a fierce wind was blowing. It was early February. The Sunday papers were out by midnight and they arrived at our drop-off points at about 2 a.m. So, carefully wrapped against the cold, we hurried out to the family car, picked up both sets of papers and delivered them quickly, all together. A front of biting air had blown the recent storm away, and the stars hung down enormous above us. There was a moon, too, that night; but the air was so cold and so clear that neither source of celestial brightness chose to quarrel with the other. I was, I believe, as happy that morning as I had ever been till then; I could have tramped through glistening snow beneath that hard sky forever. We had hot chocolate when we got home, and then piled gratefully into bed. In the years that came after I would think of that episode often; and, sometimes, it seemed unreal, as though the world in which I was living as well as the nature of our family couldn't have offered such a thing. But it had been real; and I came to look back on it as a pedal point of sorts, as a note too deep to be easily heard.

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My father worked for the State Department. He was typical in this, in being employed by the Federal Government; most of the men in South Fairlington were similarly employed. Our community was a new and enormous complex of garden apartments sprawling out on either side of Route 350, Shirley Highway; it was built, I think, expressly to house the burgeoning Federal work force. We were a homogeneous group: all white, all middle-class, all safely tucked away at night in our imitation Williamsburg dwellings. This was the post-war era still. You could leave your house unlocked, the installment plan was a good thing, and you would thrive if you worked hard, obeyed the law and loved your country. And we did, by and large, all of these worthy things.

But there were many respects in which my family wasn't so normal. Especially my father: he was a restless, aggressive man with certain ambitions and pretensions. Or they were pretensions to other people; to him they were concrete, living realities. He had, to begin with, scholarly interests which set him apart in our community. The war and his growing family had brought his graduate work at Hopkins to an end just short of his Ph.D. But he persisted; and every day, instead of going off to lunch, he went to the Library of Congress and did research for an hour. His work progressed painfully slowly. I learned that he was interested in metallurgical history, something as foreign to my world as what he did at the State Department. At length his work became a source of general curiosity, and it wasn't unusual for people—parents of friends or casual acquaintances—to ask me or my brothers, "How's your father's book coming?" They asked this quizzically, and, sometimes, ironically. I shied from the question; whether rightly or no, I thought I felt contempt behind it, an implied judgment on our family. "Ask my father," I'd say evasively and turn the talk to something else.

My father had musical interests, too. These engendered less suspicion than his academic interests. He was reasonably proficient at both the violin and viola, and he was the head of a string quartet which often convened in our living room for an evening of Schubert, Haydn or Mozart. I had mixed feelings about these evenings. My parents' friends were odd and I thought rather mediocre, though some were excellent musicians. At the same time, I was myself pursuing the piano, and I hoped one day to be able to join them. I felt this most keenly when they were doing piano quintets

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and I was given the privileged task of turning the pages for the pianist. It was sad, though, and frustrating, the audible discrepancy between my envisioned musical triumphs and the trickling sounds I made. I was basically more interested in sports than in music—I was better at sports, too—and so I never fulfilled that hope, never achieved the expertness requisite to mastering even so much as the *Moonlight Sonata.* Still, on calm summer evenings, when my father's quartet was playing, I would join with the neighborhood children in peeking in at our windows. A curious world lay within: a world in which men and women exerted themselves with swaying vigor on bulbous shapes of glistening wood. It delighted and comforted me to be on the outside looking in with this impersonal sort of vision; at such moments—and they were rare—I seemed to step out of the family, away from our strenuous aches and travails, and achieve, if only briefly, some sort of Olympian understanding, disinterest, forgiveness.

For ours was an unhappy family; our lives were dominated by tensions. My father, despite his culture, and for all of his intellectual endowments, was violent, temperamental, driven, a man who made his life more difficult than it ever needed to be. His passions gusted through him with cyclonic irregularity. Having a family burdened him, at times, it seemed, beyond endurance; when the fit was upon him, he would lash out at his children with clenched fists and dangerous eyes, scarcely aware of what he was doing. He once threw me down the cellar stairs in a boil of rage, which left a jagged gash in my forehead, and on another occasion, while beating us, my two brothers and me, he hit one of us so hard that he broke the bone in his thumb. We had to pay for the doctor out of our paper route money—it had been, he later argued, entirely our fault.

My father's attacks on us had a curious effect on my mother. Ordinarily a cheery and forbearing woman (in some ways, too much so), she would, at such times, appear belatedly on the scene in a well-wrought state of complete hysteria. Face red, teeth clenched, her aquiline nose sharpened in anger, she would rush at us screaming, "You stop it! Now, stop it! You're just a bunch of Goddamned Prussians!" This was to her mind the worst of all insults. And it quelled my father's rage—or anyhow, caused it to abate. Scoldings never dashed my father. In fact he seemed to relish them; I've always suspected that he took pleasure from getting others so worked up that their composure would give way to the sort

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of ranting he indulged in. I was fifteen when, finally, he stopped beating me: he was threatening me one evening with a malevolent thrashing, and, intent on not submitting, I rushed into the kitchen where I grabbed the largest butcher knife that lay ready to hand. I confronted him with it as he tried to advance on me. "I'll slit your throat," I warned him, "if you come any nearer!" My brothers had joined me to lend support. At just this instant my mother appeared. She staged the finest of her scenes, and my father left off threatening me. I wouldn't have actually dared to try to use that knife on him—he'd have overpowered me quickly; he both looked and was tough—and yet I seemed to have passed some test; and his respect for me, and affection, seemed to grow from that point on.

But these are the more climactic moments. Our lives were, for the most part, plagued by petty impositions. When he wasn't making music my father worked on his book in the evenings, and he insisted on doing his writing in the middle of the living room, which he wanted free of noise. Our apartment was cramped given the size of our family, and we resented his demand. Indeed, we all felt like captives when my father was around. Every day he took a nap just after getting home from work; the slightest rustle in the house during this fifteen-minute interval put him into a rage. On the weekends he would make us work in arbitrary ways, waxing floors that didn't need waxing or washing the car at midnight when we could have done it earlier. Worst of all, he was rude to our friends. He'd order them to go home unless they wanted to help us work, or he would ignore them with such vehemence that the heat of his displeasure quickly drove them from our house. This especially angered me because of all his children I had the largest number of friends, and I felt an obligation to repay the hospitality that my friends and their parents had so often extended to me. So I'd retaliate at times when he was busy at quartets by bulling truculently through the musicians during the softest *andantes*, bumping music stands and elbows and shouting imprecations on my way up the stairs if I was criticized for disrupting.

Strangely, however, in spite of his rudeness to my friends my father was very popular with them; and notwithstanding his abusiveness, he became, in his own way, a genuine leader in the community. Fierce indoors, his energy flourished out-of-doors; he was forever organizing hikes and weekend outings which he staffed with kids from all over Fairlington. He was gruff and yet pleasant

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when we went on these outings, and he had a bearlike manner of bestowing affection which our friends seemed to enjoy: he would heft them, thump them, carry them straddled on his shoulders. On these occasions he always treated his own sons as part of the group. I was proud of him then, and happy not to be singled out; I felt a snug sense of inclusion in the world of more normal people. It was the same feeling I'd have while looking in through our windows on those warm summer evenings when the quartet was playing. —Yet why did people have such trust in a man so clearly unreliable with his own suffering family? Why entrust their children to him? The answer to this, I think, comes back to the nature of his employment. He was *one of them*: being a State Department official with a top-security post and a former OSS member, he was certified, proved. People who've never lived in Washington seem to think that its vast bureaucracy is an impersonal machine. The contrary is true: it's a close-knit fraternity, a freemasonry of sorts, and everybody there knows virtually everybody else, at second hand if not at first hand. At least they did in those days. My father, in other words, was sewn into the national destiny, and this gave him privileges in the bosom of his family which no one would question, judge him dimly though people might.

*

I began delivering papers in the fall of '49. Having a newspaper route and a father who worked for the State Department in a sensitive position made it impossible for me to grow up wholly unmindful of the state of the world. It accosted me every day when I undid my bundle of papers: ACHESON TO PARIS. MOSCOW SAYS POLAND TO REMAIN A FREE COUNTRY. Of course such headlines, at first, were scarcely more than a blur for me—I'd learned to read the year before—and I was vastly more involved with the fate of the New York Yankees than with the affairs of the Federal Government; but in the course of the next few years, the world became more sharply focused, and I remember certain headlines which altered life decisively. TRUMAN FIRES MACARTHUR was one such headline; so was BERIA SHOT. Yet another—among the most memorable; the *Star* had accorded this headline the most gargantuan typeface I had ever seen in print—was TRUCE IN KOREA.

And at first such weighty matters seemed as disconnected from me as the earth was from Mars, or as my father's job in Washing-

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ton was from his playing string quartets. But that was all to change. My father had a very glum sense of the future, and his pessimistic view of the world made itself felt at home. He worked in State's Far East Bureau where he was one of the China experts; he had spent time in China near the end of the war. The Communist takeover there was an event which troubled him deeply. And more or less by osmosis, I absorbed his worrisome nature. I'd become convinced, for instance, by the time I was ten or eleven, that the Russians stood daily on the brink of invading us. My terror became so great that I made it my secret personal business to memorize the sounds which all domestic aircraft made. It wasn't hard for me since we lived in the landing corridor approaching Washington airport. Our apartment's basement windows, like those of every other in Fairlington, were subterranean windows sunk in semicircular "foxholes"; and if I heard a strange plane while I was out delivering papers, I would dive, quite literally, from the seat of my bicycle into one of these foxholes, cover my head and wait for the bombs. My father's paranoia wasn't the only thing fostering such comical delusions. At school we saw films on what to do in the event of attack (a futile business: ground zero was only two miles away), and at the movies the flickering newsreels told of Oriental purges and ominous demonstrations in Moscow. I may have my dates confused here; I might have been in junior high school when those films were being shown us on the Russian atomic threat. But strict chronology isn't important. America had traveled down the road to the Cold War, and the world, as I saw it, was growing darker, more fearsome.

My father was sent to Seoul in January of '51, just after Christmas. He was sent there on an intelligence-gathering mission of some sort, one whose exact nature is even now a mystery to me. That altered things. He was gone for three months, during which time my mother fretted and awaited irregular letters. She also permitted me and my younger brother Steve to take turns sleeping with her at night—this when I was nearly ten. Then my father came home. I remember that evening vividly. With great pomp we gathered on the living room rug. My father had gifts for all of us. First he told some tales: of how he'd rounded up food in a small peasant village during one of the bitterest winter nights; how a disembodied voice had urged the Americans to surrender—a propaganda broadcast from a high-altitude plane; how he had just escaped death on coming out of a mine shaft which his team had

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been inspecting. They'd met a team of Russians. The Russians, like themselves, had carried cocked submachine guns. As if by magic, each team had let the other pass by. And then my father gave us our presents. He had brought for my mother a large and sumptuous array of silks and tablewares and jewelry. I received a hunting knife and several bundles of worthless yen. My father also returned a small pearl-handled penknife I had lent him for the trip. When I discovered a second later that the blade had been nicked, that a tiny semicircle had been chipped out of it, I burst into a tearful rage. My father was hurt, angered, puzzled. "Jesus," he exclaimed. "Here I give you back your knife and give you a new one to boot, and you make all this fuss! I don't know *what* troubles you." And in truth I didn't either. Here was my father home, safe, from Korea; I was glad that he'd survived. Not till many years later could I fathom this matter. He had brought a whole trove of fabulous gifts for my mother which I never could have matched, and later on that evening I would have to go back to my own cold bed. I hadn't been prepared for this; and it made me feel, I distinctly remember, as if I was being sent into exile.

My last brother, Charlie, came into the world eleven months later, at the beginning of February. If I had been until then a somewhat unhappy child who sought escape in minor ways, I now became unhappy more openly and vocally. And I sought escape often. Charlie had worked a change in my mother. Until now a gentle, forbearing woman, she became harsh, embittered. Or this is how I often perceived her. She appointed me and John to take care of the baby, a task that I, for one, detested. I'd have to get up at night to change the brat's dirty diaper or get a bottle warm for him—this while my mother was sound asleep in the very next room. I grew to hate Charlie so much that I came close to killing him once; I held a pillow against his face till he was purple with desperation. But being a murderer wasn't in me. I took the pillow away in fright and, filled with remorse, I coddled Charlie with uncharacteristic tenderness.

My mother hadn't changed; it was the shape of our whole family. My father, my mother, John, myself, Steve: we had been a coherent unit, a stable constellation of five. Charlie's birth destroyed a unity that never would be mended. And it appeared to us, somehow, to have been my father's sole doing. He had brought back with him from the conflict in Asia some sinister principle of disorder, had carried it into my mother's bed where he had foisted it

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on us, without so much as consulting us, in the form of a red-faced screaming infant who'd come a month before he was welcome and nearly killed my mother in coming. Why *this* new addition when my father already felt so overburdened as a provider? My mother felt, secretly, I think, the way we did; felt that my father had tricked her somehow with a sentimentalist's ruse. How could I tell? She defended her baby by asserting its worth all throughout her long pregnancy. She'd declare, for example, when she was vexed with us three, that this was *one* child of hers who wouldn't be a foul-mouthed roughneck. She even hoped for a girl because a girl would be nicer than we were. This was unwise of her. Charlie never had a chance, so predisposed were we to hate him before he ever drew a breath. In a sense I had tried to kill him while he was still an innocent foetus. The church my mother attended stood across the street from us; and one unhappy Sunday morning when ice had stubbled all the sidewalks and she was seven months pregnant, she begged first my father, then John, and then Steve to escort her to the service. Then she asked if I would. She had asked me last, I knew, because she was hoping I'd champion her and put the rest of her men to shame. I looked her in the eye and said flatly, "Not me." "Well," she said, clearly hurt, "I guess I'll have to go by myself, then." I watched her go from the back window. Her vanity had insisted rather senselessly on heels and she was wearing a fur-trimmed coat. She wobbled as if drunk, and I was simultaneously moved by a vengeful desire to see her fall and deeply ashamed of myself for being so unworthy a son. For a long while I felt worse about my lack of valor that day than I did for having flirted, as I had later, with Charlie's life.

Korea ended. Life moved on. And it seemed from one viewpoint as though the cessation of the conflict was going to give the nation a respite. Ted Williams came home and rejoined the Red Sox; the Yankees, my team, were winning the pennant every year. I was playing ball, too: the year I was eleven I hit .324—not bad for someone as small as I was. Even my efforts on the piano were going modestly well.

But the world fears tranquillity. The darkness I'd felt mounting in the days of Korea had steadily grown. The national passion—hating the Communists—had taken root and fatally flourished. The McCarthy era was upon us. It was a hard time for me, both as a newsboy and as a son. My father feared the suspicion which had

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settled on all at State; friends of his were being called to give the Committee testimony, and for the first time in my life my parents cautioned all of us not to talk about our father with our friends or their parents. A boy in my class, Joe Volpe, was the son of one of the lawyers involved in the hearings, and I would study Joe's back (he was a letter ahead of me in the alphabetical order) in an effort to determine, as it were from his spine, whether or not his father wished to cause mine trouble.

But it was while I was delivering papers that the hearings disturbed me most. They had split the country in half. In every house the blue glow of the TV burned through the afternoon hours. My customers would accost me when I came to collect. What did I think? Where did I stand? Some were genuinely curious; most were angry and irrational in their voluminous swelling hatred. I remember one especially, a parched thin man in his mid-sixties whose apartment reeked of cigarettes. I'd known him for two years; he was a mild, affable man. Now he had been transformed. He would meet me at the door with his face tightened in rage. "What are those bastards up to now?" he'd say, and snatch his paper from me. Then his voice would dip to a murmur. "You know, there are people in this neighborhood who don't understand." I came to dread his daily assaults. Other customers' too. What did *I* know about it, I, a mere sixth-grader, a mere boy of twelve? I'd watched the hearings at a neighbor's for several bewildering afternoons—we didn't own a TV—and though I did my best to act as if I was following it all, I couldn't make sense of them. I was unsure, for example, exactly who Roy Cohn was, or where he stood in the tangled mess. So when my customers sought my opinion, I would give them the nearest echo of their own points of view as my innovative powers allowed. It made me feel like a gawky puppet being yanked on a string to go from one house to the next. And I was fearfully mindful, always, of my parents' strict injunction: *Don't talk about your father.* So every time I weakly agreed with some fanatical paper customer that all the Commies turned up by the Committee should be hanged, or with the milder sort who felt that a grave mistake was being made, I guiltily pictured my poor father being led off to prison.

Hence the world, for me, had become at once a place in better focus, and a place losing focus. It would be tempting for me to say that the McCarthy nightmare was the nadir of my childhood from a civic point of view; the nation was out of kilter, my father stood

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in uncertain jeopardy, and at home I had a new and unwanted brother to contend with. And in terms of strict chronology I suppose it *was* the nadir; the McCarthy hearings guttered when I was in sixth or seventh grade. Soon my childhood would end. But the bottom of life—my life—was reached in 1953 exactly two weeks after my birthday, which falls on June 4th. The calamity wasn't mine alone.

Throughout my grade-school years, I had a crush on a girl in Fairlington by the name of Harriet Amshan. She preferred her middle name: Sonya. So I used both names. She was a heavy-set girl with dense golden down on her forearms and wrists, and a head of thick hair. Indeed, her hair was so thick that my brother John nicknamed her, cruelly, "Hairy Harriet." To my shame I found this funny, and I lashed out at John whenever he taunted me with it. John couldn't understand what I saw in Harriet. She wasn't pretty or slender, she wasn't good at sports, and she had an asthmatic little brother whose nose dripped constantly and whose speech was impeded by the severity of his asthma. I didn't like her brother, but I tolerated him. What I liked about Harriet is hard to define. We would talk by the hour, take strolls, play games. I liked both of her parents. Her mother was sympathetic though she talked too loudly, whereas her father was quiet and more preoccupied. But they were both gentle people. Harriet, in all, was a nicely balanced blend of them.

She was also Jewish. This meant little to me; I'd for so long been included in the Amshans' festival days that I had come to regard such days as regular parts of my own calendar. Nor did it mean much to me that her father had been a lawyer at the Nuremberg trials. If I had any bias, it was against Roman Catholics, whom my mother generally hated for what were no doubt curious reasons. *I* disliked Catholics because of their arrogance, their snobbery; they were constantly proclaiming that parochial schools were better than public ones, that the only form of *true* Christianity was Catholicism, and that their school teams were better than ours. And probably I feared that they were right on all these counts.

But I was finally forced to realize that being Jewish was a problem. Classmates would snipe at me for hanging around with Harriet, and in the spring of '53, when I was in the fifth grade, I had a climactic moral encounter with a boy a year my senior by the name of Billy Bauman. One day after school Billy called Harriet a

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"Jew-girl," and I went to work on him, right there on the school lawn. I punched his nose bloody and then proceeded to kick him around. I liked beating Billy; I had insisted that he take back what he had said, but he wouldn't. I was clearly in the right. The deeper truth of it was that we'd been antagonists for years, and I was finally having my chance.

Still, when I look back on it now I see that the timing of this fight was not entirely accidental. For the better part of a year, the front pages of all the papers had carried almost daily stories about two atomic spies who'd been tried and condemned. The trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg had been a protracted one—or rather the appeals of the verdict had—and I could not remember then just when the whole fuss had begun. A year before? Two? Three? Indeed, the case against the Rosenbergs was so familiar to me, had become so well-established, that it was mixed with the air I breathed—and was, it seemed, as inexhaustible. Now, however, with eerie abruptness, things began to mount quickly. A cloud of fate was building in an otherwise clear sky.

In my own mind, I didn't connect the Rosenbergs with the Amshans or my other Jewish friends. I find this odd now. The explanation, I think, is twofold: I didn't regard the Rosenbergs as having been sentenced for their Jewishness, and I could not see any connection between their lives and my own. Familiarity had rendered them entirely remote: a pair of mythical figures, like characters in a novel. But I was bothered in the abstract by the question of execution, and as the countdown began I made a point of talking about it. I discussed it mainly with my mother. "I wonder if they're guilty."

"It's hard to say, I guess," she'd answer. She would be in the kitchen cooking.

"I mean, *really* guilty."

She would ask me, "What do you think?"

"I don't know. That's why I asked you."

She wouldn't answer me immediately. She'd be busy with a dishtowel or some other matter. "Well," she would say, "it seems they are. The jury did find them guilty."

"Yeah, I know," I said, "but how can they be *sure*?"

She seemed wearied by such questions. "They can only do their best. That's all anybody can do."

And she wished for the moment not to talk about it further. But I persisted. The days passed, bringing the execution closer. I

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broached the matter again, this time with my father. "What do *you* think?" I asked him.

We were all seated at dinner. "It's a complicated matter. If they *are* atomic spies, they've caused a hell of a lot of trouble. And I'll tell you this much." He thrust his jaw forward. "The world will be a *very* dangerous place from now on, now that the Soviets have the atom. I shudder to think what might happen."

This statement hovered in the silence over the dining room table. But it seemed, somehow, equivocal. "So, you think they deserve it, being put in the electric chair."

"Yes, I think they ought to be punished." These words had come from my mother. "They should pay for their crime. Just like anybody else."

I looked over to my father. "That's a rough judgment, Peg."

"Well, the boy wants our opinion, so we ought to tell him the truth. I think the Rosenbergs are guilty. They've done a terrible, terrible thing."

"Look," my father said, annoyed, "we are in simply no position to know one way or the other. All *you* know is what you read in the papers."

"Well, of course," said my mother. "We must *all* make judgments on the information we have."

My father glared at her. Then his anger subsided. "All right," he said to her, "let's not discuss it any more." And the conversation ceased.

But my mother understood that her words had troubled me, and either then or the next day she brought the issue up again. "I know you feel badly for the Rosenbergs," she said. "And it's a dreadful thing, I agree, that they must die that way. But at least they won't feel pain."

This assertion struck me powerfully; it altered, absolutely, my view of the whole situation. I asked her why not.

"My father had to witness an execution once, you know. And he told us that the man had gone unconscious just like that." She snapped her fingers briskly.

"But how—" I asked, "why not? Won't they feel *any*thing?"

"Why, it will hit them so fast that they'll go right out. It'll be like going off to sleep."

This explanation of hers pitched me into confusion. How could it be? It wasn't plausible. Yet what did *I* know? . . . So, having mulled the matter over, I embraced it as the truth. For it was the

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answer I was seeking. And I am sure (though this is conjecture) that if in the next few days my friends disputed this point with me, I no doubt argued it with vigor: yes, the Rosenbergs were guilty, their execution would be a shame, but at least it would be painless. Then the day came; they died.

I awoke the next morning to find that the *Post* had carried the story sprawled across its front page under a headline proclaiming the event in large letters: ROSENBERGS EXECUTED. I read the story through. It was a long story, long, and very thoroughly detailed; it was a chronicle, in fact, a vivid moment-by-moment history of the Rosenbergs' last hour: how they were led by their attendants down the corridor to the chamber; how they took their leave of each other, then were strapped in, shackled, carefully helmeted in steel. How then the switch was thrown on them at exactly 8:40—fifty thousand electrical volts. How Julius' chest had bulged forward; how Ethel's hair and lips had burned; how the scent of sizzling flesh had lifted, a cloud, into the chamber. How then the current was cut off and the Rosenbergs were inspected. How the stethoscope had shown that Julius was dead, Ethel not. How she was strapped back in and the current again applied to her body. Volted again, and finally dead.

I reread the story. There was something here, something in the account of their dying, I had not been prepared for. It was as if a vein of mine had been pricked with a needle and some serum injected. The words were indecent; they seemed to reach up and entwine me and pull me down into them. I read once again how Julius' chest had heaved spasmodically in an ecstasy of panic to fight free from the thrilling current. My bowels went loose. My heart plunged. I read the account over from the very beginning. I was abruptly thrust away, delivered over to a shore entirely new to my experience. My head fought through numbness. I fell away from full sentience toward a large whitened space where illness deadened every breath. A painless death: I had been deceived. The world I had known was not real; there lay behind it another world, an unplumbed world of pain and woe, a world where ordinary people would commit on one another, with formal pomp and ceremony, unspeakable atrocities. A fabric had been rent, a rip begun in some membrane; and in terror I balked, as though to go any further would leave me stranded forever.

I returned from that shore. I had not been deceived. I had known all along that my mother had lied—lied, perhaps, to her-

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self; lied, most surely, to me. I read the whole account again. It had fastened hypnotically on me; I could not let go. And every time I came to the passage which described Julius' chest, my footing threatened. I held back. My interest, now, became more clinical; and I relived with both of the Rosenbergs the awesome final stages. The hideous business of dying *seated.* The grotesqueness of any sort of voluntary compliance. The final free moments of their use of their arms and legs. The feel of the shackles being fastened, first wrists, then ankles. The curious care of the attendants—the tiny considerations, even. The anomalous innocence of the chair. And, finally, the helmet. How would it be, looking out from within one's own skull, which was to become, a second later, as one could not quite believe, a jangling bed of inner torment? Looking out through normal eyes at expectant eyes, at human faces. Who were willing this on you. It would be, I considered, the very second the current hit—by surprise, necessarily—that would be worst of all. It would be in this instant that all of life was repudiated: the understanding of one's fellows, the worth of having had an identity, heart, children, love, lungs. *You do violence to my person.*

I grew faint several times as that morning wore on, and as that story, inch by inch, inscribed itself upon my skin. A deep ache settled on me as if I'd just been beaten and was one large bruise. What to think of the whole drama? I didn't know. I felt fear: fear of crime and wrongdoing, fear of the world's huge power, fear of my own poor judgment. Nor would I know for many years what to think of it all. For I was a patriot, like my parents, and patriotism required, I thought, that one believed what one was told, that authority must rule, that the Russians were wicked, the Red Chinese worse; that all subversives must be punished, and that children had, rightly, no voice in the world. Nor could I make any connection between my reactions of that morning to the *Washington Post* and my own violent deeds, which were abundant and sometimes grim. But still, I had learned something, though it would be a long while before this something came to the surface in any sort of articulate shape, and I would have to relearn this something in a thousand different ways before the grains in my hand would have added up to a visible handful. It had to do, simply, and yet perhaps not so simply, with the privacy of suffering, with our solitude in pain. And I learned then, too, that my imagination, mine, was the only door which led me toward the suffering of others. I could never quite trust reassurances after that, especially those of my

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parents. And my talent for morbidity, which had never been quiescent, now erupted in the form of unhealthy imaginings and dreams.

*

I stopped delivering the *Star* when I was fifteen and a half. At last my parents had bought a house; but we didn't move far. We deserted South Fairlington for an even newer community on the north side of Arlington. I held no other job until I'd graduated from high school, and this, even more than displacement, was uprooting for me. I had depended on my papers and on the money they had brought me for my slim independence; this gone, I was parasitic. I grew progressively less happy and longed for the day I went off to college. Besides, my father had become beneath the burdens of owning a house an even more tyrannical man, and it is quietly remarkable that we went our separate ways without more serious violence.

Ironically, as it turned out it was he who went off. He had left State some years earlier for a post at USIA, a move he'd made primarily to keep from going overseas. But now the Foreign Service had caught up with him and he was being sent to Teheran as Cultural Attaché. I took leave of him and my mother in a backwoods village in central Virginia, where I was working for the summer. It was June. I was busy, free. I had an income of sorts, and I could get myself to college when September rolled around. They had driven down from Arlington to bid me farewell; but now, with lunch and talk behind us, they hung back, reluctant. I was eager for them to go. I had grown wary of them: I had been, too often, either ambushed or outraged to find their presence entirely pleasant. Still, civility constrained me, and a mixed sense of gladness. Then they did say good-bye. My mother, as I recall, wept. My father smiled and shook my hand. He seemed to understand why I was holding off from them—at any rate, partly understand. Then he said, "We'll be in touch." I must have said something in response to this statement, and then they pulled off down the hillside, raising dust from the slope which led down into town.

"We'll be in touch," he'd said. I knew I could count on that.

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PHILIP BOOTH

The Valley Road

Before eight,
the sun already hours up
into May, the thin
children come out.

Clustered
in front of shut
housetrailer doors,
or farmsteads gone to
dry rot,
they open
like laughter:
loose-
strife, bluet, star-
flower, arbutus,
early
at every
schoolbus stop.

A Slow Breaker

Washing on granite
before it turns
on itself, away

from every horizon
it fetched from,
this clear green wash,

the flashing, cold,
specific gravity of it,
calls the eye down

to what we thought to
look into, to all we
cannot see through.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

A Most Unmelancholy Dane

THE ROYAL DANISH BALLET'S SALUTE to August Bournonville, in the form of a week of his ballets in Copenhagen last November, raised more questions than it answered about the nature of nineteenth-century ballet and of this particular, possibly not-so-typical ballet master. Bournonville died in 1879 after fifty years of almost unbroken service to the Royal Theater. He composed over fifty ballets, of which seven complete ones and portions of a few others are all that remain in repertory. This in itself is a puzzle, since the Bournonville vocabulary and style have been continuously maintained in the Danish Ballet's training, and his works have been lovingly handed down by a succession of dancers with the help of his own and his associates' copious production notes.

But his works went in and out of style. Some of them were politically touchy—too patriotic, too egalitarian for the times; some received less than adequate initial productions and didn't outlive their unpopularity; Bournonville himself, temporarily out of favor, would leave his post for a period of time, and would start making cycles of new works when he came back, inspired by his travels to Italy, Russia, Vienna. After his death, succeeding directors tried to modernize the repertory, then retrenched again, and it seems with each phase another ballet slipped away. As late as the 1930s *The Toreador* was allowed to lapse; it's now represented by a collage of numbers and isn't considered authentic enough by Kirsten Ralov, one of the company's principal keepers of the flame.

In comparison with other nineteenth-century ballet work, though, the volume and relative purity of the existing Bournonville oeuvre is quite amazing. Considering the number of interpolations, omissions, rearrangements, condensations and total restagings with which historical ballets are handed on to us, we're fortunate to have any steps at all we can call Petipa's, or a libretto something like *La Fille Mal Gardée*. Aside from inevitable changes in costumes and decor, you get the feeling that the Bournonville ballets look a lot as they did when they were made. I think one reason is the unity with which they were conceived. Bournonville fused the elements of his theater—dancing with acting with scenic effects; fantasy with realism; character with moral and social attitudes—so ingeniously that every dance and every character is implicated in the story.

The pas de deux from *Kermesse in Bruges* is sometimes performed alone as a showpiece (in the New York City Ballet's *Bournonville Divertissements* for instance). As it begins, the young man offers the girl a flower, later his hand, and she hesitates before accepting each time. This little contretemps has always looked coy to me—sometimes because dancers seem self-conscious about such a virginal mannerism. Within the whole ballet, what happens is that the girl is asking her father if she can accept the boy's invitation. This establishes her youth and her obedience to her fa-

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ther. She's a nice girl, not a flirt. The pause, turn, and return are built rhythmically and spatially into the choreography, and I've never seen them skipped, as are the Black Swan's similar asides to Rothbart in the third act of *Swan Lake.* Here, the woman's going away from her partner and coming back are simply a device to spur his desire for her. Odile could easily think up ways to inspire his passion without her father's advice, and when the pas de deux is performed alone we don't sense that any third party is missing. Marius Petipa clearly separated acting from dancing, story from virtuosity, and the Russian ballet classics are usually done today as spectacular bits of dancing surrounded by impressive but nonessential mise en scène.

I think Bournonville somehow regarded his ballets as living paintings—like the nineteenth-century Scandinavian genre paintings that caught the life of a particular community at an ordinary moment, with all the emotional and cultural forces within it brought to that one focus. To those who perform them from childhood to retirement, these ballets become a culture of their own. But the community of each ballet is not sacrosanct. The dancers grow into their roles and interpret characters differently. You can see that they're not merely reproducing a finished ideal, as Japanese actors in the Kabuki tradition do, for instance. The troll brothers Viderik and Diderik in *A Folk Tale* are set up as opposing temperaments, Diderik the ferocious one, and Viderik the timid, soft-hearted one, but in two casts that I saw (one in a dress rehearsal), Johnny Eliasen's Diderik was not only hot-tempered but potentially violent, while Niels Kehlet's seemed more simple-minded and out of control. The Viderik of Fredbjørn Bjørnsson was shy but kind; Hans Jakob Kølgård acted terrified to do anything on his own, which made his rescue of the heroine especially poignant.

The dancers still take the same kind of care about consistency that Bournonville did. You're seldom aware of some bit character who makes a single appearance to create atmosphere or diversion and then dissolves back into the crowd. More often, if a character is singled out at some point, he's apt to continue weaving himself into events as they unfold. A colorful traffic of witches and trolls, cripples and lunatics, children, elders, foreigners, neighbors, soldiers, itinerant peddlers and performers makes the ballets incredibly rich in texture and scale. Yet for all their diversity they never become incoherent or fuzzy.

The nineteenth century certainly had more tolerance for such detail than we do—and Bournonville's ballets seem almost modest compared with accounts of the five-act epics done in France and Italy during his time. Modern versions of story ballets are streamlined, condensed, cutting through plot, character and scenery to give us a direct route from one dance number to the text. The final acts of George Balanchine's *Coppélia, Nutcracker* and *Harlequinade* are nothing more than divertissements. After sketching in a barely plausible link to the foregoing story, the stage is cleared for the real action. In their different ways, the contemporary opera house ballet styles of John Cranko in Western Europe and Yuri Grigorovich in Russia follow the same trend.

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Even when the musicality and the compositional invention are as superb as Balanchine's, this modern approach can be limiting. Only one kind of creature inhabits this world of "big" dancing, athletic sexuality, high-tech professionalism. Only one kind of world is portrayed—the world of the real, the pragmatic. When Balanchine refers to the past, for instance in his Tchaikovsky ballets, it's the closed, Imperial past of ballet and ballet imagery that we see, a past significant mainly for having given rise to the Suzanne Farrell or Merrill Ashley who's before us. When he refers to another culture, the force of its metaphor is channeled into his variation, incorporated, used, and finally surpassed by his vision. If we look for authentic Scottish dancing in *Union Jack*, we'll be disappointed.

Bournonville and the nineteenth century accepted the existence of many worlds, not all of them understood or accessible. Bournonville brought those worlds to the stage, often in admittedly crude or imaginary form—his darkies in *Far From Denmark* are clichés, his Eskimos, Chinese, red Indians in the same ballet are naive. But he's not just throwing exoticisms into realistic ballets for the sake of variety. Whenever Bournonville ventures outside the world he establishes as home, specific contrasts are intended, specific lessons are being offered.

The foreign divertissements in *Far From Denmark* reflect the travels of the sailors to strange lands. Perhaps the blatantly caricatured nature of these dances indicates that they're unknown even to the sailors—unlike the Argentinian port where they're stationed, and where beautiful señoritas and languorous warm nights tempt them to be unfaithful to their wives at home. In *Kermesse,* during a farcical scene where a commoner seduces fatuous rich women with a magic ring, there's a grossly exaggerated black woman among those vying for his attention. The supposed eroticism and danger of tropical races is represented here as the extreme to which a frivolous society can go in pursuit of pleasure.

Southern blood seemed to signify passion to Bournonville, and passion signified danger. He was well aware of the attraction of the strange and the sensuous. The supernatural world, of course, was even more compelling and more dangerous than the exotic, and had the added power of magic to lure the adventurer. The two worlds can never be reconciled, according to Bournonville, and in his pessimistic ballet *La Sylphide* the hero, completely hypnotized by a sprite, forsakes his home and fiancée to pursue her into the forest. But James isn't content merely to run away with the Sylph and indulge in a romantic woodland idyll. He's fatally tempted by another supernatural power, Madge the witch, whom he has treated badly earlier. She convinces him he can capture the elusive Sylph by giving her a special scarf. The scarf is poisoned; the Sylph succumbs to her longing for it (there are degrees of wickedness even in the supernatural world). James wraps it around her; he finally brings her down to earth, and in his arms at last, she dies. Madge finishes off James too, as Effie, his fiancée, marries his friend Gurn, who has never been infatuated with anything but Effie.

La Sylphide is almost unique among Bournonville's works in allowing its main character to lapse so far into fantasy that he can't get back to the

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real world. In the others, Bournonville contrives to present the exotic, and its temptations, without allowing it to destroy the everyday world he values more. In *Far From Denmark,* the naval officer gives up his South American girl friend when he realizes that he still loves his Danish fiancée, and Rosita goes off with another Argentinian. Birthe, the troll who grew up as an heiress in *A Folk Tale,* marries the libertine Sir Mogens after her real identity is discovered. All of the men in *Kermesse* end up with their proper girl friends as the magic tokens that caused all the mischief get locked up for safe keeping and taken away by the mayor. And in *Napoli,* Gennaro and Teresina are reunited after the storm; we can interpret the interlude with the naiads in the Blue Grotto as saying that she has either died and been restored to life by a miracle, or entered the world of the undersea spirits and come out again through the power of love and religious faith, or had a cautionary dream.

Bournonville offered this most palatable combination of cake and morals by employing all the devices and conventions of the nineteenth-century theater, and the Danes carefully reconstitute them for us today. The stage of the Royal Theater is small but deep, almost a square—but all this activity fits in it. The audience is very close, and even from upstairs the angle of view helps us look *into* the stage. Most ballets today are staged either for a flat, front-on picture or for their geometrical floor patterns to be seen from above. A Bournonville scene is three-dimensional. Things happen close up and far away and off in the corners. People don't just make entrances, they can approach almost unnoticed through a crowd, or emerge from much farther out in the landscape than we thought we could see. The deceptive depth of the stage allows wonderful things to happen—elves materialize out of the ground, Gennaro poles his boat into a cave, the sun rises delicately on a distant hillside while the forest stays dark. An astonishing effect—created entirely by the choreography—happens in the first act of *A Folk Tale*, when a line of peasants dances close to the footlights and in the upstage to downstage plane, masking the clearing away of a table and chairs from the center of the stage. The relative narrowness of the stage is also used brilliantly, not just for its compression and crowding properties. Bournonville often has his duos and small ensembles dancing very close together, and when they jump or gesture wide, the choreography seems even more energetic, more irrepressible than it normally does.

Not enough theater-historical work—or dance-historical work for that matter—has been done on the literary and theatrical precedents of Bournonville's oeuvre. I wish I knew more about the ballets that were contemporary with his, and exactly where and how the surviving Bournonville has been modified. Watching the ballets, I'd suddenly be struck by images from other works. *La Sylphide* (1836) with its haunted forest antedates *Giselle* (1841), but Bournonville returned to the idea of malevolent fairies in *Napoli* (1842) and *A Folk Tale* (1854). The latter ballet opens with a hunting party in the woods, where we meet the petulant Birthe, a spoiled rich girl who, we learn later, is cursed with troll irascibility; and her unhappy fiancé Junker Ove. He's like the prince in *Sleeping Beauty* or *Swan*

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Lake, a young man who has everything but his true love. When he refuses to join Birthe's fretful games, she goes off with the other nobles and he paces aimlessly. Despite the striking similarity to expository scenes in the two Russian ballets, *Beauty* and *Swan Lake* were composed decades later, in the 1890s.

At this point in all three ballets the hero meets his dream girl; in all three cases she's under a spell and he won't be able to marry her until it's broken. But where Petipa and his collaborator on *Swan Lake*, Lev Ivanov, used dancers alone to reveal the heroine, Bournonville engineers the apparition with sophisticated theater illusion. A partition in the backcloth is raised to show the trolls at work in their smoky cave under the hill. Hilda steps out of this tableau and tries to persuade Junker Ove to go back with her. Suspicious of the troll-vision and the magic goblet she offers him, he stays behind when she's recalled to the underworld, though a troupe of elves temporarily befuddles him.

With this image, Bournonville establishes the ambiguity of Hilda's situation. We learn later that she's been switched in the cradle with Birthe, and as Birthe has been shown to be a misfit in her adopted world, Hilda is too beautiful and refined for the trolls, although she's fond of them. She's their captive, but once she realizes she belongs to the mortal world she will enlist yet another fence-straddler, the "good" troll Viderik, to help her escape.

In Petipa's recognition scene in *Sleeping Beauty* the Lilac Fairy shows Aurora to the prince by surrounding her with a vaporous crowd of women who part to show glimpses of her, then close around her again; and in Ivanov's scene in *Swan Lake* Siegfried discovers Odette in the midst of a flock of tutu-clad swans. Both these scenes emphasize the beauty and enchanted unattainability of the princess, but little else. It takes a whole act of *Sleeping Beauty* and a telegraphic mime sequence in *Swan Lake* to explain who they are and what their dilemma is. The Russian works are already leaning toward the modernist preoccupation with the dancer, the creation of metaphor through dancing not theatrics, and the condensation of all peripheral business and mytho-cultural background, into brief, splashy effects.

Not that Bournonville minimized dancing. In fact the expressive range of his dancing is remarkable in itself. We're most familiar with the exacting footwork and rebounding jumps of the pas de deux, solos and small ensembles that have been danced frequently as separate numbers. Bournonville could orchestrate this surging energy into a heady, almost exalted celebration like the tarantella at the end of *Napoli*, or present it as the purest distilled essence, in the classroom steps of *Konservatoriet* or the mirror dance in *La Ventana*.

But his dances can also tell us about whole societies—how they are stratified and how they fit together. As *A Folk Tale* opens, the peasants are preparing lunch for the aristocrats. When the party arrives there's an extraordinary scene in which the nobles gather around the table center stage. Some sit down, others are standing. During their convivial lunch, the peasants dance a very orderly set of formation dances. For once, the lower classes are shown as contained and disciplined while the upper class

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cuts loose. Lunch over, the peasants leave and the nobles do an even slower, statelier formal dance. To complete these marvelous contrasts, in the second act there's a troll party to celebrate the engagement of Hilda and Diderik, with a grand entrance of assorted raucous lumpish troll families and a demonically drunken ball, danced to a crashing can-can. Once again I saw Bournonville anticipating, and satirizing, the great ballroom scenes of storybook ballets to come.

Troll behavior was another new experience for those of us accustomed to the simpler modes of the supernatural found in non-Nordic ballets. I grew strangely fond of these almost-human creatures as they raged and bumbled their way through *A Folk Tale* and some of the other ballets. In Bournonville's lexicon, they have an affinity for the ground—they live under the ground after all—and they're not so much other-worldly as an intensification of all the baser human qualities. Even before Birthe realizes she's a troll, she not only acts temperamental but has some trouble keeping her feet under control. She strides around aggressively, stamps her feet in anger, and kicks them in an unladylike way when Sir Mogens pushes her on a swing. As her inner conflict grows, and as Hilda is approaching to reveal both their true identities, Birthe dances in front of a mirror. She begins with elegant curtsylike sweeps and bends. Suddenly her feet start to twitch; it's as if sparks were shooting up from the floor, impossible to escape, making her legs and arms fly out in all directions each time she seems to get them smoothed out.

Nowhere is the duality between Bournonville's good and evil better illustrated than in this startling dance. But in another way, that's what he is always showing us. People dance with abandon when they belong to the spirit world, or when they're under a spell—another example is the whole town mesmerized by Carelis' magic fiddle in *Kermesse in Bruges.* The Spaniards in *La Ventana* and the Gypsies at Hilda and Junker Ove's wedding are not transported, but they're more liberated in their dancing, more florid than the decorous lovers.

But these contrasting worlds, domestic and alien, aren't cut off from one another. The Gypsy divertissement (pas de sept) in *A Folk Tale* is not some specialty act imported to entertain at the wedding; you can easily believe that these lively celebrants make their camp somewhere out in the country, just between the village and the troll hill, and that, dressed up in their handsome costumes with signs of the zodiac for decoration, they can be included in the community. Just as you can believe that tomorrow they might be scaring children who venture too far from home at dusk.

These many worlds of Bournonville live together in comfortable toleration, even intimacy, despite their differences. People are constantly barging in on each other at home. Madge the witch hobbles into James and Effie's wedding, and is made welcome by Gurn. The villagers on Amager not only billet the King's Volunteers but flirt with them as well. Hilda wanders into Birthe's bedroom at the manor house, straight from trolldom, and recognizes it as the place where she should be—and the aunt, nurse and servants immediately accept her, while the furious Birthe retires without a struggle.

The decent, ordinary people—even Hilda and Junker Ove aren't royal

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but merely upper-class—hope and search, are tempted and recall their faith just in time, and are rewarded not with crowns and kingdoms but with love and a fireside. At the center of *A Folk Tale* is the nurse Catherine, who warns Junker Ove about the troll-hill, tries to soothe the schizophrenic Birthe, and recognizes Hilda as the child she once rocked in her arms. At the center of *The King's Volunteers on Amager* is Louise, the fiancée of the philandering lieutenant, who tricks him into admitting his infidelity and then lovingly forgives him.

Toward the end of the festival week, I was watching the wedding waltz from *A Folk Tale* on a tape made for television. Suddenly I realized I would be very sorry to leave Copenhagen and Bournonville. The week had been too full, too social, there hadn't been enough time to rest or think; yet I felt refreshed and more positive about dancing than I had in a long time. Yes I was thrilled by the novelty of a new style, and by the splendid dancers, especially—for different reasons—Ib Andersen, Niels Kehlet, Frank Andersen, Johnny Eliasen, Lis Jeppesen, Eva Kloborg, Annemarie Dybdal, Anne Marie Vessel, Sorella Englund, and Kirsten Simone. I loved seeing the resources of theater so fully and magically used. But even more involving than the unexpected depth and range of Bournonville's imagination, there was his moral certitude. He shaped a universe, neither stuffy nor pious, where anything may happen but the center holds. After one hundred years, his sense of all's right still has the power to move and reassure. No wonder he survives.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle: Kurt Weill

THE FALL AND WINTER just past in New York were a season for Kurt Weill, and no one could have been happier about it than I. The New York City Opera revived its first-rate staging of Weill's *Street Scene* (1947), an opera written for Broadway only three years before his death, and it was acclaimed by press and public once again. Then the Metropolitan Opera staged *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), one of his collaborations with Bertolt Brecht, for the first time in its history. Both productions were telecast nationwide via the Public Broadcasting System. Julius Rudel was scheduled to conduct the American Symphony Orchestra in Weill's Second Symphony (1933) late in December, and early in 1980 the New York City Opera was scheduled to mount Weill's *Der Silbersee* (in English, as *Silverlake*), one of his several operatic collaborations with the German playwright Georg Kaiser.

Der Silbersee is virtually unknown both in this country and in Europe; likewise, in spite of occasional revivals, Weill's once-hailed American works for Broadway are now only a succession of titles—*Lady in the Dark, One Touch of Venus, Lost in the Stars*—that reverberate dimly in the memory of the older generation of American theatergoers. As for Weill's non-dramatic music, it is only in the past five years or so that some of his orchestral and chamber works have begun to turn up on concert programs. Is this a case of deplorable neglect or deserved oblivion? All I know of such a work as *Silbersee* are the two numbers Lotte Lenya—Weill's celebrated widow and the chief advocate for his stage music since 1928, when her special qualities pretty well defined for all time the role of Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera*—sings on the Columbia recording of "Berlin Theater Songs" (MG 30087). So I cannot state unequivocally that anything in the "unknown" Weill could find the kind of immediate response both *Mahagonny* and *Street Scene* have found among New York audiences recently. But based upon what the excellent London Sinfonietta three-disc Weill anthology (Deutsche Grammophon 2709 064) reveals, there is a considerable fund of deserving work that ought to be given its opportunity to prove itself with the public.

Both stagings in New York met with general critical approval (*Street Scene* more so than the "larger" work), though not the equivalent of the kind of public endorsement implied by their sold-out houses. Much ink was consumed on the question of whether the two works were operas: both use spoken dialogue and melodrama—accompanied speech—as well as sung solos, ensembles, and choruses, and both employ structures, rhythms, and melodic styles closely associated with popular music of the time—marches, tangos, jazz forms, and so on. To me the question seems more semantic than substantive: Weill called both of them operas, and wrote both for trained voices, though he subsequently altered the original

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Leipzig version of *Mahagonny* for the cabaret-style delivery of Lenya and others in the Berlin production of Ernst Josef Aufricht the following year. In the New York productions, both seemed to suit the talents and the venues employed even when they were at their most "popular."

Of the two, *Street Scene* was generally accounted the more successful totality. The Met followed pretty faithfully Brecht's prescribed "epic" format for *Mahagonny,* with a minimum of scenery and other distractions, and inscriptions projected upon a stage curtain to draw the moral or announce the action of each scene. The New York City Opera accorded its choice the full traditional treatment, a *trompe l'oeil* New York tenement façade and surrounding milieu framing the slice-of-life action of the Elmer Rice play about a faithless wife, her murder by her distraught and alcoholic husband, and the effects on her daughter and neighbors. Its gentle pity-the-poor-working-man message could offend no one in a late-seventies audience (indeed, this was the sole aspect of the piece that merited the label "dated") and in Eileen Schauler as the errant wife it had a very winning central figure—central, perhaps, by default, for Catherine Malfitano, the daughter, had the largest role, but her mannered delivery and stagy posturing, together with the fact that much of the vocal writing lay below her best range, removed her from the circle of sympathy. Both Jack O'Brien's direction and John Mauceri's conducting were expertly ungimmicked.

That Weill ended his days in America—and in fact enthusiastically embraced all things American, preventing thereby any reconciliation with Brecht after the rupture of their association in the early thirties—is both peculiarly appropriate and poignant. Lenya recalls, in the album notes for Columbia's recording of *Mahagonny* (K3L 243), that in the twenties

> . . . all of us were of course fascinated by America, as we knew it from books, movies, popular songs, headlines—this was the America of the garish Twenties, with its Capones, Texas Guinans, Aimee Semple MacPhersons, Ponzis—the Florida boom and crash, also a disastrous Florida hurricane—a ghastly photograph, reproduced in every German newspaper, of the murderess Ruth Snyder in the electric chair—Hollywood films about the Wild West and the Yukon—Jack London's adventure novels—Tin Pan Alley songs—I think it is not difficult to trace some of this in the make-believe America of *Mahagonny.*

It is not only not difficult, it is quite obvious.

The origins of the work lie in five poems Bertolt Brecht published in his collection *Das Hauspostille* (translated differently by two Brecht scholars, as *Manual of Piety* and *Domestic Breviary*), an ironic "guide to the perplexed," in 1927. In them Brecht saw Mahagonny, a name he may have coined as early as 1923 when he first saw Brown Shirts on the streets of his native Augsburg, as a "cynical, stupid beer-hall state" located in a vaguely American never-never land. Two of the poems—"Alabama Song" and "Benares Song"—were written in English, in the idiom, as

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Hugo Schmidt puts it in his notes for the Grove Press edition of *Hauspostille*,[1] "of one who has listened to American jazz singers without really knowing English." Weill set the five and a new epilogue, provided some linking music, and the *Mahagonny-Songspiel* bowed at the Baden-Baden contemporary chamber festival later in 1927. Brecht and Weill expanded the work to its familiar proportions as they collaborated on *The Threepenny Opera* and afterward, and the completed work had its premiere in Leipzig in 1930, where it occasioned a riot. Productions in a few provincial German cities followed; in Berlin, it was a fashionable success. But after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 it was heard no more in Germany.

Weill described the ultimate three-act version of *Mahogonny* as "a series of twenty-one separate musical forms. Each is a closed scene, and each is introduced by a projected inscription." It was "the purest form of epic theater." He wrote further that

> . . . the subject of this opera is the history of a city, its formation, its first crises, then the decisive turning point in its development, its time of glory, its decline. It is a set of "morality pictures of our time" projected on an exaggerated scale.

Somewhere in the desert near gold-prospecting territory, the widow Leocadia Begbick, on the lam from Brecht's earlier play *Mann Ist Mann*, and two other fugitives from justice, Fatty the Bookkeeper and Trinity Moses, found Mahagonny, "the city of nets," or snares. Within its boundaries the *laissez-faire* capitalist ideal will be sovereign: everything is permitted to those who can pay—the only restraint upon unbridled individual freedom to consume. Begbick and her colleagues, of course, will batten upon their inspiration. At first they see their quarry as the miners who have struck it rich, but soon they are recruiting "the discontented of all continents" for a life of ease and pleasure in Mahagonny. To the "golden city" come Jimmy Mahoney and his companions, Jacob Schmidt, Moneybags Billy, and Alaska Wolf Joe. They have spent seven years at lumbering in Alaska, and are seeking respite from toil and deprivation. For a time they thrive in Mahagonny's ethos: they have plenty of money. Begbick offers Jimmy the services of Jenny Smith "from Havana," and the two seem well matched. But something is amiss in the city. In spite of the absence of toil, the abundance of pleasure, "the peace and harmony, and something to rely upon" that were among the provisions of its charter, many are leaving. Prices have sunk, and business is bad. The disillusion catches up with Jimmy, who proposes to leave but is prevented by his cronies. Later he grows violent and threatens Begbick. As a hurricane approaches, and destruction looms for the city, Jimmy perceives that Mahagonny has not been true to its principles, that restrictions of many kinds shackle individual freedom, and that salvation for it and its citizens is to abolish all restrictions and permit everyone to do as the unchecked force of his will dictates—like the hurricane that rages nearby. The storm changes course,

[1] *Manual of Piety*, translated by Eric Bentley, notes by Hugo Schmidt (New York: 1966).

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sparing Mahagonny so that it can act out its destiny. "From now on, the motto of the people of Mahagonny was 'You may do it,' the motto they had learned in the night of horrors."

Now come the four emblematic tableaux: "Eating," "Making Love," "Fighting," and "Drinking." Jacob Schmidt eats himself to death, and the men partake of Jenny's and the other prostitutes' favors incessantly. In a boxing match between Alaska Wolf Joe and Trinity Moses, Jimmy bets all his money on Joe, who is killed in the ring. But Jimmy will not disavow the motto of Mahagonny, and stands everyone to rounds of drinks at Begbick's tavern. He cannot pay—and Jenny will not in his stead. A kangaroo court is convened, and Begbick, Fatty and Trinity Moses sentence Jimmy to death. He is executed in the electric chair, after a touching farewell to Jenny. Two tableaux follow his death: "God Comes to Mahagonny," and the last days of the city. In the former, the men of Mahagonny tell God he cannot condemn them to hell because they are already there; in the final scene, mass protests—each participant carrying a placard bearing a different slogan—lead to the declaration of the citizens that "we cannot help ourselves or you or anyone."

What is one to make of this grotesque cartoon? Most commentators hurry past its contradictions and lacunae with generalities about hedonism, anarchism, Marxism, and man's inhumanity to man. Others take a closer look and see intentional paradox and irony in the work's peculiarities. Perhaps. But even when the nature of Brecht's epic theater is alluded to, its implications for *Mahagonny* are seldom considered. Because the work's purpose is didactic, its characters are not the dramatis personae of traditional drama, creations of a literary mind intended to suspend disbelief, for an hour or two, in their literal existence. Brecht did not want us to "believe in" Jimmy, Jenny, Begbick and Trinity Moses; they are masks for the many faces of the playwright, who accuses, sermonizes, cajoles, mocks, chides, and jeers at us from behind them. So it is idle to try to reconcile Jimmy's or Begbick's behavior in one scene with that in the next: the playwright manipulates them ruthlessly to the advantage of each scene's schematic design. I do not mean to deny all consistency to these creatures. But surely it is clear that for Brecht, to the extent that he was able to shape them consciously, they were mouthpieces in his polemical entertainment first and "people" only secondarily. Epic theater, he said, "works out scenes through which people behave in such a manner that the social laws they are subjected to become visible."

It was Brecht who approached Weill for the first settings of the *Mahagonny* poems that led to the *Songspiel*. Throughout its seven-year span, their association must have been both instructive and troublesome to the playwright, for by 1930 he had formulated *his* notion of the proper role for music in the modern theater, and it was not a role Weill's musical inclinations were comfortable in. In his "Essays 4–7," Brecht slapped the pejorative "culinary" on traditional opera—a feast for the bourgeoisie. In contrast, the music in modern opera must be independent of the word: that is, it must not heighten the emotional impact of the text, create a psychological context, or suggest how the audience should feel about

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what it is viewing; instead, it provides a vehicle for the text or throws an ironic light upon it. Brecht, appalled when he heard the orchestral parts for *Mahagonny* for the first time, feared that the music would swamp the text, and Aufricht, the producer in Berlin, recounts the classic music-versus-text squabble between composer and playwright during rehearsals. The two collaborated only once afterward—on the "ballet for singing," *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petit Bourgeoisie*, when both were in exile in Paris in 1933.

What put Brecht off was the phenomenon implicit in Weill's dramatic music: the characters and situations are fleshed out by the music, and through it transcend and repudiate the mechanisms of epic theater. Weill's links to Mahler have been cited by several commentators, and the young composer's debt to the older goes beyond his use of parody and quotation, of popular song and dance forms, and of mordant humor, to a similar brand of expressiveness. In *Mahagonny*, listen to the commiserating violin obbligato that accompanies the chorus of the discontented masses in the second tableau, the music of Jimmy's lament, after his arrest, that night gives way too quickly to the day of his trial, and the "Havana Song" ("Oh, think it over, Herr Jacob Schmidt"), with its supporting muted brass and winds—three examples among many—and, perhaps most significant, the repeated motifs associated with the "seven years" and the "bitter weather" Jimmy and his chums shared in Alaska before coming to Mahagonny. All of this music is more than illustrative: it is affecting, in much the same way that Mahler's music is at its best.

But the ambivalences of the work go beyond the imperfect union of music and dramatic intention. Brecht's play itself embodies contradictions that cannot be explained entirely as deliberate paradox and irony. There is one reading of *Mahagonny* that makes sense of most of its inconsistencies. Jimmy Mahoney is the single character who retains a broad range of human responses in the depravity of his social milieu. Because he shows affection for Jenny (who returns it, but later refuses to pay Jimmy's debts), sings a joyful song as the hurricane threatens Mahagonny—that is, resists despair—demonstrates his loyalty to his fellows by betting all his money on Alaska Wolf Joe in the fight and his generosity by standing everyone to drinks in spite of his empty pockets, he jeopardizes the complacency of a selfish society, and it kills him. Jimmy Mahoney, in short, is a proletarian hero (he even asserts at one point that he doesn't want to be a "human being"); his declaration of Mahagonny's every-man-for-himself motto is an aberration brought on by his immersion in its depravity. Jimmy bursts the bonds of epic theater, and makes his vehicle not just a cartoon, but something akin to romantic drama—whatever Brecht may have consciously intended.

The Met production exposed these contradictions mercilessly. The bruised waywardness and spunk and submerged sensuality of Teresa Stratas' Jenny were very appealing, and Richard Cassilly's Jimmy, though not comfortable vocally, was winning in other ways, and counted for a lot of the work's theatrical effectiveness. Their scenes together were directed to evoke something not far from a boy-meets-girl stock response,

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and Jimmy's apostrophe to the night recalled, for one listener at least, Florestan's prison aria in *Fidelio*. "Epic theater" was honored in the breach, even if the text's stage directions were hewed to closely. The work was sung in the superb English translation of David Drew and Michael Geliot. James Levine conducted, and perhaps treated the score too reverently: a lot of its raucous energy was absent. But against all odds a sufficient portion of the strangely beguiling and buoying appeal of *Mahagonny* came across to make the evening a stirring one.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Chardin

THE EARLIEST PICTURE now attributed to Chardin is *The Game of Billards,* said to date from the beginning of the 1720s. Born in Paris in 1699, the artist seems not to have submitted to any extended artistic education, apart from some drawing lessons from Pierre-Jacques Cazes, and the stiff, "primitive" quality of *The Game of Billards* suggests the consequent lack of academic fluency in his work. Although the multi-figure composition may evidence some ambition on Chardin's part to become a history painter, the most admired of the academic categories, its theme is hardly that of the usual eighteenth-century painter of historical and mythological subjects. Representing a host of small-scale figures engaged in playing or watching billiards in a large interior, the scene must have come naturally to the son of a billiard table maker and is already characterized by the homeliness that was to inform Chardin's art to the end. One is instantly reminded by the scale relationships and the familiarity with which the subject is observed of certain of Chardin's contemporaries, none of them French. Although Longhi comes at once to mind, the muted palette—an overall dark tonality sparked with red and black—and restraint of the brushwork suggest closer affinities with such Englishmen as Devis and Hogarth. The only French parallel to suggest itself is Le Nain, the most northern of Frenchmen, emphasizing how heavily northern the work is in spirit.

From the mid 1720s until the early 1730s Chardin turned exclusively to still life as a subject. So different are these early still lifes from *The Game of Billiards* that it is difficult to believe they are from the same hand. Although the general color scheme of the earlier work persists—generally a dark tonality based on a reddish or greenish brown, sparked with red and/or green—the still life compositions are larger in scale and more baroque in character. *Two Rabbits with Game Bag and Powder Flask,* for instance, is composed so that various elements of its subject overlap one another rather than being presented serially, as in *Billiards.* Those elements radiate centrifugally from the lower center of the composition within a pictorial space that is not the rectangular box (room) of *Billiards,* but a much vaguer and more interesting construction involving a shallow niche at the back and a drop off into infinity in the foreground. The brushwork is firm and broad, and there is clear interest in texture and the differentiation of texture. Even more ambitious is *The Hound,* a large effort involving a hunting trophy, composed of a horn, a rifle, and some dead game, at the right played off against a dog at the lower left and a rocky landscape with sky above. *The Hound* is, however, less interesting than *Two Rabbits,* in part because of the woodeness of the animal itself, and in part because its composition is more frontal and planar, hence more static, than that of the smaller picture. There is, moreover, a certain disjunctiveness to the com-

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position, and the dog and landscape are less than successfully integrated with the elaborate trophy. This is exaggerated by the extreme value contrast of the dog, rendered largely in white, and by the unsubtlety of the intrusive blue of the sky. In this particular picture Chardin seems to have been defeated by the scope of his ambition, and perhaps by an effort to come closer to the French character of the work of such painters as Desportes and Oudry.

If Chardin did feel the need to explore the bravura side of the French artistic temperament, he never lost sight of the northern, increasingly Dutch, character that was to shape so much of his art. Although relatively static as a composition, *Preparations for Lunch* is a simplified *kleinmeister*-ish composition in Rembrandtesque clothing, permitting Chardin to explore texture and the play of light across objects of different textures, shapes, and color values. He also experimented with hue, as the title of *Basket of White and Red Grapes with Silver Goblet, Bottles, Peaches, Plums, and a Pear* suggests. While the titles of these works, many of which are due to the descriptive necessities of later sales catalogues, may seem unnecessarily clumsy, they do give a sense of how carefully Chardin chose and focused on the few objects he represented, as well as how varied in character those objects were. Moreover, they force the viewer to concentrate on the fact that a good part of Chardin's genius was expressed in the intensity with which he realized and evoked his apparently simple subject matter. He shared this latter quality with Cézanne, the first of the later artists of whom one is constantly reminded in his work. The still monumentality of *Carafe of Wine, Silver Goblet, Five Cherries, Two Peaches, An Apricot, and a Green Apple* brings this parallel home, despite the fact that in it Chardin has not mastered coloristic and compositional coherence sufficiently to make the picture hang together. *The Buffet,* a large picture that is in many ways a more accomplished version of *The Hound,* is an example of how baroque bravura helped Chardin create striking works that are ultimately more impressive in their details than in their ensemble. Although the fruit in the pyramid at the center is beautifully rendered, for example, its total effect verges on vulgarity, partly because of the concentration of red in what is otherwise an almost monochrome picture. Nevertheless, *The Buffet* is a considerably more subtle composition than *The Hound,* witness the placement of the highlights in the white tablecloth that spreads across the center of the picture, modulated by the fall of light, by the objects seen on and against it, and by the coloristic counterpresence of the pyramid of fruit. There is here an increasing unification brought about not by an imposed system such as perspective but by the interweaving and balancing of hue, value, and shape. If the result seems more closely tied to Chardin's time and place than many of his other efforts, the Dutch of a century earlier are not forgotten—witness the partially peeled lemon—although it is the exuberant Dutch such as Ruych and Huysum that are invoked.

One of the masterpieces of these years, and a picture in which Chardin was successfully able to integrate the baroque aspect of his art with its more restrained side, is *A Green-Neck Duck Hung on the Wall and a Seville Orange.* Although only the two eponymous objects are presented against a

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neutral wall, the relatively intense color of each and the irregular roundness of the orange played off against the cursive shapes of the duck imbue the composition with a non-geometric freedom. The palpability of the represented objects is enhanced not only by the chiaroscuro in which they are modeled and by their colors, but by the way in which they simultaneously emerge from and contrast with the atmospheric ground. The grounds of Chardin's still lifes, inevitably gray, grown, or gray-brown, are of crucial importance in enlivening his pictures and holding them together. They must be luminous, a characteristic he achieved either by leaving them broadly brushed like underpainting, or by washing all or part of them with gray, as in the *Green-Neck Duck.* When they go flat through lack of modulation, as in the *Attributes of the Painter and Draftsman,* the picture suffers severely.

Others of the still lifes that show the slow emergence of Chardin as a master are *Hare with Gun, Game Bag, and Powder Flask,* characterized by a strong composition, powerful and clearly articulated brushwork, and a striking blue and gray-green color harmony; *Two Rabbits, a Gray Partridge, Game Bag, and Powder Flask,* in which the partridge, in particular, is described with the dry-brushed texture that was to serve the artist so well in his figure pieces; *Musical Instruments and Basket of Fruit,* characterized by the delicate pink and blue harmony that also developed more fully in the figure works; and *Attributes of the Sciences* and *Attributes of the Arts,* with their coloristic richness and variety. The crimson of the latter picture is unfortunately intrusive in its intensity, making clear that Chardin is better served by surrendering to his native reticence than by attempting grand gestures, capable as he may be of bringing off larger and more elaborate pictorial efforts. In general, the painting of these early years brings home the fact that Chardin was in no way a prodigy, but a painter of great native talent and a sensibility somewhat apart from that of his time who had to fight through to his major accomplishments and the realization of his ability. Not a fluent painter like Boucher, his awkwardness was overcome by the force of his vision and his consummate ability to develop pictorial means appropriate to that vision.

Sometime in the early 1730s Chardin took up figure painting as a serious genre. Although his figure compositions are, like the earlier *Billiards,* small in scale, the figures themselves are considerably larger in relation to the overall compositions they inhabit. What led him to take up the figure, normally considered a more ambitious subject, is not clear, but it is entirely possible that having consolidated his style and secured his position as a painter—he had been admitted to the Academy in 1728—he felt free to explore a genre that previously might have restricted him because of the conventions imposed on it by traditional training. In any case, he started producing domestic scenes which, while devoid of drama, were charged with emotion, and continued to create them to the end of his days. The two or more versions of many of these scenes, usually all but identical, suggest how deeply he felt his subjects and how carefully he worked them over to bring out refinements he may have thought lacking in his first attempt. Although there is sometimes noticeable difference of finish or technique in two versions of the same picture, there is often little

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difference in overall quality. *Soap Bubbles*, for example, exists in both horizontal (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and vertical (National Gallery of Art, Washington) versions. Although the latter is generally a more successful picture than the former—its less pronounced contours and narrower range of values give it more coherence—the Metropolitan version has a more interesting paint surface and certain details—the stone parapet, for example—are livelier. Just as Chardin had produced large elaborate still lifes, he essayed a few ambitious figure pieces. Neither of the two major examples of this type—*Lady Sealing a Letter* and *The Philosopher*—is successful. Although both contain passages of first-rate painting, the figures in each are awkwardly situated in the large spaces in which they find themselves, introducing ambiguities of scale.

No picture evidences Chardin's mastery of the single figure composition by the late 1730s as well as *Little Girl with Shuttlecock*. Composed of a relatively large-scale figure seen in three-quarter length and almost in profile against a delicately inflected neutral ground, it is a picture of the greatest strength and restraint. The figure is delineated with a lambent line at once firm and soft, lit by a subtly inflected pattern of light and shadow, and enhanced with a minimum of the most ordinary accessories—a chairback, a racket, and a shuttlecock. The color harmonies are characterized by an overall grayed brown and modulated white enhanced with a softened red and the most delicate of pinks and blues. In sum, the painterly means are in every way an embodiment of the reticent and introspective psychological character of the work, resulting in a painting that makes few concessions to the viewer but ultimately rewards him with the most exquisite of esthetic experiences. Even pictures as large for Chardin as this (81 × 65 cm.) demand to be seen close up for any meaningful understanding of the subtlety of the means employed and the quality of the paint surface. Close viewing is particularly necessary for the smaller one, two, or three figure domestic scenes, which are cabinet pictures at their finest. In the latter, the dry brushing that also characterizes the *Little Girl* works particularly to enliven the surface and unify the work, blending colors into one another and permitting hues to show through from beneath. This extraordinary *pâte*, so different from impasto, is perhaps Chardin's most striking technical achievement and was to show up again in the works of such mid-nineteenth-century painters as Couture, Millet, and Daumier. At times, Chardin rejects it in favor of a more sharply delineated finish that emphasizes his links with such Dutch seventeenth-century painters as Metsu, Dou, and Terborch. By mid-life, however, Chardin's clear affinities with the northern masters had been thoroughly integrated with his native French sensibility, and if his love of sensuous represented surface is indebted to the north, the richness of his painterly means and his palette are deeply personal transformations of the art of his own time and place. The fact that he continued to struggle with his style shows how hard-won was his masterful accomplishment, the results of which are filled with ease, and how demanding his own artistic nature.

During the 1750s and 1760s there was a notable return to still life as a subject in Chardin's art. He now brought to it, however, the stillness of

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his domestic genre scenes. In the latter, women are seen, sometimes with children or servants, in the most ordinary situations. They are preoccupied not in the way Boucher's or Fragonard's people are preoccupied—at play—but in reveries unique to them, their gaze directed not at the beholder or at another event within the picture, but into empty space. On the few occasions when they do regard one another, as in *Saying Grace,* the finest and most Jamesian of psychological filaments unites them. Just so, the late still lifes present a few objects isolated against plain grounds, in an almost Spanish spareness. The subjects themselves are less often dead game than fruit or kitchen utensils, the same utensils used to decorate the domestic interiors. Chardin's formats turn from vertical to oval, squarish, or horizontal, and both the represented objects and the edges of the shelves upon which they are placed, tend to fill the pictorial space, extending out to, or beyond, the edges of the canvas. Backgrounds go slightly opaque behind foreground objects and are lightened behind dark ones. Pictures of this type had appeared as early as the 1730s, elaborated somewhat with curving shelves and niches (*A Pitcher with Cover, Two Eggs, a Casserole, Three Herrings Hanging on a Wall, a Copper Pot, a Slice of Fish on a Pot Cover, and a Jug on a Stone Ledge*), but they appear in greatest profusion in Chardin's old age. Flowers, never a major subject for the artist, also appear occasionally, as in the iconic and extraordinary *Bouquet of Carnations, Tuberoses, and Sweet Peas in a White Porcelain Vase with Blue Decoration,* which prefigures Fantin-Latour. Although Chardin's color could still become strident and his compositions over-elaborate, he was astonishingly able to bring off large pictures of great complexity, and to control even relatively high pitched color and extremes of value, as in *Attributes of the Arts and Their Rewards.* But his greatest accomplishments were still the smaller, sparer pictures, such as *Jar of Apricots.* Here, his softened blues and oranges are enlivened with reds and seen within a continuous gray-brown color atmosphere whose modulations are assisted by the dry brushing by now characteristic of almost all his pictures. Given the texture of this brushing and the particular kind of color layering it permitted, it is no wonder that at the very end of his life Chardin turned to pastel, a medium in which he could work directly in dry color. Turning once again to the figure, this time to portraiture, he demonstrated, as have so many great artists, that age is no restraint to an adventurous spirit.

Although acknowledged from early on as a master, Chardin has always occupied a curious place in the history of art. This is clearly due in part to the temperamental difference between his work and that of his contemporaries, evidenced in his affinities with the painting of the north, England and Holland in particular. More specifically, it has to do with the introspective quality that makes his art one that offers little by way of obvious effect. Rather than placing him among his contemporaries, one tends first to see Chardin in relation to the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century, then in relation to some of the great figures of the nineteenth century. This necessity to look to other times and places to find meaningful parallels to Chardin's accomplishment suggests how far separated he was from the official position that had identified hierarchies of subject matter in the previous century. The fact of that identification itself—the

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evident necessity to codify that it represented—makes clear the progressive weakening of the Renaissance-based heroic figure tradition. Increasingly, from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth, art was to find major qualitative fulfillment in what seemed to be its byways. The programmatic demands of official art became too restricting for flights of genius, which then had to find outlet in less "serious" avenues. Charles Rosen has discussed this development in eighteenth-century opera, pointing out the failure of tragedy in that medium, and the shift of "moral gravity" to comedy, remarkable in such works as *The Marriage of Figaro.* Just so, the moral gravity not only of Chardin's figure pieces but of his still lifes makes the declamatory morality of much mythological and historical painting seem empty rhetoric. Felt, as opposed to proclaimed, morality moved increasingly toward the private and away from the public, and art became, as it were, increasingly protestant. That Chardin is central to this development as it applies to painting paradoxically lifts him out of his time and place. This puts him in the company of other great artists who similarly transcend their immediate circumstances.

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Reviews

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Too Much Even of Kreplach

"NOWADAYS," Wallace Stevens noted in a letter to his younger Cuban friend José Rodriguez Feo, "it is common-place to speak of the role of the writer in the world of today. But why not think and speak of the role of the reader in the world of today. . . ?" Well, in the course of this chronicle, I hope to be able to do just that from time to time. One good reason for doing so is that your chronicler thinks himself less a critic than a reader. He would go further, though, to say that he is not by any means sure that contemporary fiction really offers a grownup enough to do. Oh, there is the job of separating the chaff from the chaff, which is what much of the work of the critic of contemporary fiction turns out to be; and then there is always the hope of finding that rare diamond in the dunghill. But anyone who read exclusively, or even chiefly, contemporary fiction would soon grow listless and depressed, his teeth would loosen and his hair fall out, and he would require long stretches away from the job, possibly in sanatoria.

With this brief preface out of the way, it will perhaps be evident why, although they all fall within this chronicler's chronological purview, three novels that will not be reviewed in this particular chronicle are John Barth's *Letters* (772 pages), James Baldwin's *Just Above My Head* (596 pages), and Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (1,056 pages). The reason for this is not vastly complicated, and can be set out in three short words: too damn long. Or at least too damn long for novelists whose recent books have not exactly been overladen with beauty, wisdom, or urgent messages. I do not wish to seem as if I am in the employ of the journal *Consumer Reports,* but nonetheless I have done a little comparison shopping, the results of which I share with you here.

I tot up the Barth, Baldwin, and Mailer volumes combined at 2,424 pages. Allowing some leeway for type- and page-size, these three works together are longer than Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* a work I should like to read at least one time more before my corpse is sent to the worm ranch. At roughly the same length of the Barth, Baldwin, and Mailer, I could read instead Dostoyevsky's *Diary of a Writer* and the seven volumes thus far published (minus the scholarly apparatus) of *The Works of William James* in the new Harvard University Press edition. I could read instead Taine's *History of English Literature* (four volumes), or Freud's *Collected Papers* (five volumes), or *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (one volume, 1,176 pages in double columns). I could read *The Historical Memoirs* of the Duc de Saint-Simon, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War,* with enough space left

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over to throw in a couple of Balzac novels of decent heft. I could read . . . But I think my point is made.

As a reader, I know of no regular reviewer of fiction whose endorsement of a novel I unfailingly trust. I myself never altogether trust a negative review, but tend to stay clear of books that are praised by certain reviewers or kinds of reviews. When a reviewer of John Barth's *Letters* calls it "triumphantly labyrinthine" that is all the hint I need to stand aside. When Miss Joan Didion, perhaps the most cheerless woman in the Americas, chants a dithyramb of praise over Mailer's *The Executioner's Song,* I mutter "By me" and throw in my cards. I do not want to give the impression that I read a great many reviews of novels, though sometimes, in eagerness to learn the reviewer's opinion, to discover the review's bottom line (in the current cant phrase), I skim over literally to—the bottom line. Wondrous things are on occasion to be found there. "Recently," the last line of a review of Philip Roth's new novel runs, "Roth's voice has grown teeth, and *The Ghost Writer* bites into the heart of the artistic enterprise." Do not merely block that metaphor—send it to an orthodontist.

Reading blurbs and bottom lines as I sometimes do, I recently note two writers to whom the word "master" has suddenly come to be applied; I refer to John Updike and Philip Roth. These novelists have taken their ample share of biffing and banging from critics and reviewers over the years, but how did they so suddenly get to be masters? As Lord Bryce once said that the United States seems to have gone from barbarism to decadence without ever being civilized, so these two writers seem to have gone from errant boys to masters without ever being merely very good. I shall not be investigating the Updike claim on this trip, but I should like to go over the papers on the Roth.

Philip Roth's talent has never been in question; it is—and was from the beginning—estimable. Powers of observation and invention, of language and comedy, these he appears almost to have been born with. What has been in question, and remains so, is the range of his mind and the generosity of his heart. The book on Roth is fairly well known: he began as something close to a boy prodigy, with the splendid stories in *Goodbye, Columbus;* he then wrote the lugubrious *Letting Go;* thence he moved on to his one *Judenrein* novel, *When She Was Good;* and, next—here sound a few rusty trumpets—*Portnoy's Complaint,* a success scandalous and financial. Two utterly flat comic works, *Our Gang* and *The Great American Novel,* were punctuated by a short work entitled *The Breast,* about a man who imagines himself turned into a female breast.

Although Roth wrote two further novels, I, like a high school lover of Roth's own generation, stopped at *The Breast.* Roth had, I assumed, caught a fatal literary disease: his imagination was inflamed with psychoanalysis. His writing aspired to become a cocktail mixture of Kafka and Lenny Bruce, with more than two parts Freud added. It became, at least in the view of this reader, very boring. A critic worries about a writer's development; a reader asks only for good and interesting books. Is Philip Roth's most recent novel, *The Ghost Writer,*[1] such a book?

[1] THE GHOST WRITER, by *Philip Roth.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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While one is reading *The Ghost Writer* it is very interesting; and it is never less than artful, flecked everywhere with touches comic and apt. The novel has to do with a forty-three-year-old writer named Nathan Zuckerman, who recollects his visit, some twenty years earlier, to a famous and reclusive Jewish writer named E. I. Lonoff. Lonoff lives in the country, in New England, near the women's college where he teaches. Although an American, Lonoff's work is, to young Zuckerman, "as though the hallucinatory strains in Gogol had been filtered through the humane skepticism of Chekhov to nourish the country's first 'Russian' writer." Lonoff's wife is a New England gentile named Hope, doubtless because she hasn't any, being married to E. I. Lonoff, who is ascetic and self-sacrificing—he sacrifices all pleasure and spontaneity to his art. A former student of Lonoff's, a former displaced person, a young woman of delicate elegance named Amy Bellette, who is in love with Lonoff and wants him to run off with her, is also on hand during Zuckerman's visit to the older writer. And—to set the last chess piece in place—the backdrop to young Zuckerman's visit is a dispute he has been having with his family about his using a sordid family scandal as grist for a story he has written—a story that his father thinks more likely to end as grist for the mill of anti-Semitism (open 365 days a year, including Yom Kippur).

Now Roth has said, in an interview in *The New York Times Book Review,* that, "The direction my work has taken since *Portnoy's Complaint* can in part be accounted for by my increased responsiveness to, and respect for, what is unsocialized in me." What Roth thinks of as "what is unsocialized in me," I, as a reader, think of as his uninteresting obsessions, which seem to be two: Sex and being Jewish. Sex, at least in its mechanical aspects, has for some time now been a novelistically dead subject, having gone from its status as D. H. Lawrence's "dirty little secret" to its current status as everyone's dreary big bore. As for the Jews, Roth's work seems always to have had a strain of *épater les juifs.* I do not mean to say that Philip Roth is a self-hating Jew, or a Jewish anti-Semite, or anything so fancy as that. Roth has legitimately wanted to be the real thing, a true artist with all the freedom that comes with the job, yet here was this perfectly ordinary New Jersey Jewish background of his dragging—nay, schlepping—him back. New Jersey Jewish middle-class culture provided him, at once, his material as a writer and the culture he must transcend; or so he appears to view the matter.

It is good to report that Roth's old obsessions are becalmed in *The Ghost Writer.* Sex there is and so are there Jews; so, too, the spirit of *épater*—but all, as I say, in subdued form. Even though there is the inevitable Roth character—his stand-in this time around is of course Nathan Zuckerman—the novel's subject is not entirely about the further adventures of the young comedian-writer-analysand but about the costs that art exacts from the artist. Lonoff, on the novel's last page, is described as "the picture of the chief rabbi, the archdeacon, the magisterial high priest of perpetual sorrows." He pleases his readers but everyone around him is made miserable because of his devotion to, his total absorption in, his art. On a lower level Zuckerman is divided by his loyalty to his family (and the Jews) and his need to write his story (the requirements of his art). If the

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novel can be said to have any resolution, it is that writers must do what they must do, including spread gloom, make messes of their lives, cut themselves off from the people they most love. Art, as the old cliché has it, is a jealous mistress; also an ungenerous wife, a miserable daughter, and a rotten aunt—in short, a bitch.

Yet while Roth's by now old obsessions—the unsocialized part of him, as he thinks of it—are in partial abeyance, that part of him that is the talented yet recalcitrant boy writer, who wishes to shock yet still be adored, is not. Thus in *The Ghost Writer* he imagines Lonoff's student Amy Bellette to be none other than Anne Frank, whom, he further imagines, he will marry and bring home to his family, enabling him finally to win their approval. ("*Anne, says my father—the Anne? Oh, how I have mistaken my son! How mistaken we have been!*") In an earlier story Roth had imagined Franz Kafka had survived and wound up a refugee teaching at the hebrew school he attended in New Jersey. What will be next: Martin Bormann as a counselor at a boys' summer camp in the Poconos? The problem with this sort of thing is that it seems so to call out for admiration—to want points for cuteness. See how clever I am, how imaginative!, it seems to say. Roth really ought to be better than this. *The Ghost Writer* is his eleventh book; its author is heading toward fifty. Enough already, as Sophie Portnoy might say, so write already!

Apologies. I see that I have slipped into the voice of the critic, lecturing, scorning, scolding. I shall try to keep this tendency under greater control. A writer such as Rhys Davies, who writes for readers and not critics, makes it easy to do so. Mr. Davies, a Welshman who died in 1978 at the age of seventy-five, is described on the dustjacket of *The Best of Rhys Davies*[2] as a "professional author," a fine old designation. He wrote sixteen novels (not one of which I have read), and a great many short stories, a large number of them published in *The New Yorker*. But the primary pertinent fact about him is that he satisfies what Justice Holmes, a great and highly cultivated reader, called "the bourgeois attitude." Holmes, in a letter to Lewis Einstein, wrote: "I don't care for art if it does not fulfill the end of art for me by pulling the trigger of an emotion."

Rhys Davies wrote stories that, formally, are of a conventional kind. An incident sets off a train of action: a young man gets a letter informing him that he is to lose the lease on the cottage his family has lived in for many decades; a married man dies in the bed of his mistress; a boy boards a train and sits next to an Indian snake charmer. Davies had the gift of limning character, and the knowledge that character is the chief thing in fiction. But he could also evoke an atmosphere, and paint a landscape lovingly. He can dab in a detail that is so right that one wants to run up to shake his hand, for example, when he notes, "A man blowing a trumpet successfully is a rousing spectacle," which damned if it isn't. "All Through the Night" is a story about a woman who every second night drinks two-thirds of a bottle of whiskey, smokes a single cigarette, talks back to the BBC home programme, and goes "up to bed feeling a won-

[2] THE BEST OF RHYS DAVIES, A Personal Collection of Short Stories, by *Rhys Davies*. David & Charles. $12.95.

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derful lack of contumaciousness toward the world." While not all of Rhys Davies' stories in this collection are set in Wales, the best—the best of his *Best*—are. Welsh village life gives him a setting elemental yet not less complicated for that, throwing off as it does some wonderful specimens of the human type. Reading Rhys Davies' stories one thinks, this is a man who really knew life—and loved it anyhow.

Before going on to discuss Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter,*[3] I must own up to a predisposition, a piece of patent readerly prejudice: my love for fiction with a South African setting. I have never been to South Africa, nor do I have family there. I know the country, in fact, chiefly through its fiction—through the novels and stories of Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith, Dan Jacobson, and Miss Gordimer. Yet when I read the words "veld" and "dorp" or the place-names Cape Town and Johannesburg, I am a gone goose, my heart is swept up as it is when I read the words Nevsky Prospect or "hectares," or imagine a family like the Rostovs traveling in the spring mud between Moscow and their country estate. This connection between contemporary South Africa and nineteenth-century Russia is perhaps not wholly arbitrary: what the two have in common is a society with serfdom, and I fear an end for South Africa quite as tragical as that which befell nineteenth-century Russia. I read the tragedy of South Africa to be that things are very wrong there as they are, and that when rough justice is done and the nation's blacks take over control of the country in which they are a vast majority—in ten years time, or twenty, or fifty?—things will probably be even worse.

Nadine Gordimer, then, has a great subject—a country playing out an historical tragedy—and it is astonishing what a big subject will do for a writer. Although people who care intensely about such things might not care to hear it, one of the things that a big subject can do is relieve a novelist of the burdens of nicety of style. In the course of Miss Gordimer's longish novel I came across many a description that seemed to me very far off the mark; at any rate I often simply could not visualize what she was describing. I cannot, for example, see the blouse in Miss Gordimer's description of a woman wearing "a blouse like a grey burst sausage." Nor can I quite picture "smoked-blue teeth," when I believe heavy smoking turns teeth yellow, sometimes with a greenish tinge. I am fairly certain of the dermatological falsity of Miss Gordimer's observation about "the thick eyebrows that compensate men for losing their hair." As for the young man whose hand feels "masturbatorily round his back and chest under the pullover," him I don't even want to discuss. Does it seem pedantic to mention these many little miscues? I am afraid it does—and, worse, is. And this for a simple reason: where subject looms large, style looms less.

Yet style is not utterly negligible in *Burger's Daughter.* As a reader, I must report that Miss Gordimer's novel is a mighty slow read. The best I seemed able to do in a single sitting was thirty or so pages. Along with stylistic infelicities, Miss Gordimer puts many another obstacle in a reader's way. Points of view shift in her novel. Characters are often men-

[3] BURGER'S DAUGHTER, by *Nadine Gordimer.* Viking. $10.95.

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tioned who never appear. Shotguns—in Chekhov's famous metaphor—are placed on walls yet are never brought down to be fired. A great many characters flow in and out. Miss Gordimer's is a crowded canvas, though perhaps it is more accurate, in referring to *Burger's Daughter,* to speak of a mosaic. Reading the novel one feels much of the time as if one were looking at a mosaic very close up, tile by tile; and it is only toward the end that one gets a feel for the whole—that one stands back and says, My, this is really quite impressive.

Nadine Gordimer's novel is about a white South African family whose heritage is that of unrelenting political activism, and for whom "the list of raids, arrests and trials was the family album." The Burger in *Burger's Daughter* is Lionel Burger, a physician and a member of the Communist Party of South Africa, and hence in open opposition to the government of South Africa and its policy of apartheid: "the dirtiest social swindle," as one minor character in the novel calls it, "the world has ever known." Lionel Burger dies in a South African prison, his wife has also put in her share of time in prisons, and the question in the novel is whether their daughter Rosa—born in 1948 and named after Rosa Luxemburg—will be able to elude the fate of her parents of foregoing life's quotidian pleasures while working for other people and living "between the present and something called the future." That Miss Gordimer works out Rosa's fate in a manner that could not have been predicted yet seems in the end inevitable is a tribute to her art. "To know and not to act is not to know," a line from Wang Yang-ming, a fifteenth-century Neo-Confucian, and the epigraph to the second part of *Burger's Daughter,* is the proposition made persuasive in Nadine Gordimer's pages. This is a novel that gives scarcely any pleasure in the reading but which one is pleased to have read nonetheless.

From apartheid to cowhide. Short relief is what Henry Wiggens, the hero of Mark Harris' new baseball novel *It Looked Like For Ever,*[4] pitches at the end of his career in the major leagues, and, after the densely packed dolorosities of *Burger's Daughter,* it was short relief as a reader that I was in need of. Now I am a man who wastes roughly two hundred hours a year watching baseball, so I consider reading a novel about the game the very height of self-indulgence—tantamount, I suppose, to a greatly overweight lady reading a novel about candy. Ah reading and its secret vices!

It Looked Like For Ever is one of a series of books that Mark Harris has written around a character named Henry Wiggens. From an earlier novel in the series, *Bang the Drum Slowly,* a very likeable movie has been made. This is a very likeable book, and to damn it with a little faint praise, I should say that it rather amused me but not violently. Part of the problem is that it goes on too long, allowing Mr. Harris to repeat jokes and stretch out bits that were perhaps best deleted to begin with. Evelyn Waugh, the one great comic writer of our age, was doubtless correct in bringing in his comic novels at around 200 pages. (Mr. Harris' novel runs to 300 pages.) It needs to be said, too, that *It Looked Like For Ever* will be

[4] IT LOOKED LIKE FOR EVER, by *Mark Harris.* McGraw-Hill. $9.95.

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flat-out incomprehensible to someone who has not been following baseball rather closely over the last two decades—or roughly since hair blowers have come to be standard locker-room equipment and nearly half the young millionaire ballplayers, as Russell Baker has pointed out, seem to be named Rick.

It Looked Like For Ever is about the sadness of growing older in a game for younger men—of being, in effect, struck out by Nature. Henry Wiggens has reached forty, retirement age—actually well past it—for most baseball players, and his problem is that he would like to play out one last season so that his youngest daughter can see him play. But such plot as there is here is scarcely more than an excuse for Mr. Harris to mock the clichés of baseball and to deflate the overblown pieties of a game that, since the infusions of large sums of money made available by television fees, in most respects has become a business like many another. Mark Harris truly knows his subject, and knows what is funny about it and what is poignant about it. The difficulty with his book is that in it the most heavy-handed jokes commingle too easily with the most subtle. The effect is rather as if a solid three-hundred hitter were picked off every third time he got on base—the man would have to be sent down, as one sets down *It Looked Like For Ever,* with regret. Finally, I do not want to end without remarking on Mr. Harris' little orthographic touches—perhaps added to put him in the tradition of *Huckleberry Finn* and Ring Lardner's *You Know Me, Al*—which show up in the title of his book and in such sentences as the following: "This was 1 trick I could never get used to as 1 never does learn more than 1 thing at a time." I should like the author to know that each time I came across such orthographic jollity I cursed him, softly but with great sincerity.

Just as I read Mark Harris' baseball novel in mid October, with the World Series humming away in the background, so did I read parts of Mary McCarthy's novel[5] about a hijacking while I was myself aloft in airplanes. But, in the case of Miss McCarthy's novel, not even verisimilitude of atmosphere seemed to help. From its second-hand similes ("like iron filings assembling around a powerful magnet") to its author's potted politics (one of the novel's characters is described by another as "the farsighted old liberal"), *Cannibals and Missionaries* seems a novel less written than willed into being—and one which it takes a certain amount of will to continue reading.

It has been said before that Mary McCarthy's is a wholly destructive talent. Intended perhaps as an insult, this phrase need not necessarily be epithetical. Literature has known some splendid destroyers: La Rochefoucauld, Pope, Flaubert, Waugh. But the problem with Mary McCarthy, in my view, is that the artist in her struggles with the intellectual—and, increasingly as she grows the older, the artist loses. This problem is only a problem in the first place because the intellectual in Miss McCarthy is not very interesting; intellectually, her views are rather conven-

[5] CANNIBALS AND MISSIONARIES, by *Mary McCarthy.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $10.95.

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tional: she is a mocker of capitalism, a friend of the third world, an anti-anti-Communist—in short, she pushes the full shopping cart of left-wing opinions. Because this is so, no subject can be worse for her as a novelist than a political one. Politics, alas, is all that *Cannibals and Missionaries* is about.

The novel begins with two neatly etched portraits (Quiet: Destroyer at Work!) of an Episcopal priest and a woman college president, who are members of a committee to investigate reports of torture in Iran under the Shah. Other members of the committee are a leftish lady journalist, an Oxford history don, a retired Episcopal bishop, a member of the Dutch parliament who is also a poet, a besotted American expert on the Middle East who is C.I.A., and a U. S. Senator modeled on Eugene McCarthy ("He could claim the fall of Johnson . . . "). The artist in Miss McCarthy wants to go to work on this crowd, to ply their pretensions, to lay open their weaknesses, but unfortunately there isn't time to do the job up right, though there are some wicked little stabs: "I'm an indifferent man, Victor," says the Eugene McCarthy-like character. "That's my secret." But the intellectual-politician in Miss McCarthy is to win this day.

The committee's plane is hijacked, the committee members kidnapped along with a group of American millionaire art collectors on an archeological tour of Iran. Their captors are young Dutch, Arab, and Latin American terrorists. The remainder of the novel is taken up with working through and out of this situation. The terrorists arrange to have flown into their hiding place some of their art-collector hostages' paintings—a Vermeer, some Cézannes, and lesser works—which they threaten to destroy if their demands (that Holland withdraw from NATO and cut off diplomatic relations with Israel) are not met. There are disquisitions upon the value of art to bourgeoise society (will the Dutch government really allow a Vermeer to be destroyed?), upon terrorism ("terrorism was art for art's sake in the political realm"), and an appropriately violent ending. Miss McCarthy is rather fonder of her terrorists than she is of the hostages, with the result that the terrorists are not very terrifying and their victims not easily sympathized with. The artistic destroyer in Mary McCarthy has been clobbered by the intellectual uplifter, and if there be a message in this novel it is that despair must be replaced by hope among the young and depressed. *Cannibals and Missionaries*, the work of a writer of maturity and recognized accomplishment, is a novel neither entertaining nor profound.

After slogging through Mary McCarthy's exercise in political dilettantism, it seemed a good idea to read a novelist whose experience of politics has been more direct and therefore real. Vladimir Voinovich is a Soviet writer—author of *The Ivankiad* and *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin*—I have not hitherto read, but have wanted to. Not yet fifty, he has already won the highest literary honor his nation has to bestow: dismissal from the Soviet Writers' Union. In the translator's introduction to *In Plain Russian*,[6] a recent collection of stories, he is quoted as remarking: "My character is absolutely not that of a dissident. I am a

[6] IN PLAIN RUSSIAN, by *Vladimir Voinovich*. Translated by *Richard Lourie*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $11.95.

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completely apolitical person. I have never held literature to be a part of politics." Voinovich's problem—also his crime in the view of the Writers' Union— is that he writes about the world as he finds it.

That he is the real thing, an artist to the bone, is unmistakeable the first paragraph into the first story in *In Plain Russian*. Voinovich is, in the airlines' immortal phrase, a no-frills writer, who is almost militantly anti-artifice; and indeed in the story in this volume entitled "What I Might Have Been," the narrator notes of a ladyfriend: "I found Klava in her usual position, lying on a low ottoman surrounded by books. She devoured enormous quantities of books, which made me a little envious. But you can't just read indiscriminately. Everything affected and artificial in her came from books." "What I Might Have Been" is a story about a construction supervisor who asks only to be allowed to turn out work that he will not be ashamed of. Voinovich does not write of Soviet labor camps, or of political terror, but of the general run of life: of dusty provincial towns, of soldiers on furlough trapped into marriages, of death sudden and illogical. In "A Distance of Half a Kilometer," Afanasy Ochkin, beginning a day in perfect health, returns home, quarrels with his wife, who sets a bowl of soup before him and goes out to work in her vegetable plot. "When Katya came back she saw her husband sitting at the table, his face in his plate, his red hair drenched in pea soup." Dead. "In the main room," Voinovich writes of the funeral, "people were saying that the late Ochkin had never done anyone any harm. And if he had, it hadn't been much. True, he'd done even less good. That said, they began speaking of their own affairs in a half whisper."

The pitilessness of life, a pitilessness not without its occasional comic touches, this is Vladimir Voinovich's subject. But it would be wrong to leave the impression that he is a one-note writer, all unrelieved dreariness, a Maxim Gorky without tears. As an antidote to this charge, I recommend a wonderful story entitled "Skurlatsky, Man of Letters," about a crazed nineteenth-century littérateur who, in his lust for fame, accepts authorship of an anonymous revolutionary manifesto, for which he is arrested and eventually sent off to a lunatic asylum. As the Tsar's police drag him off, Skurlatsky calls out to his wife: " 'Evdokiya, take care of the children. Tell them that their father perished in the cause of freedom.' 'Officer, officer!' called Evdokiya, drowning in tears. 'It's all lies and nonsense. He never had any children!' "

While reading Vladimir Voinovich in the early mornings, I happened to be also reading, in the evenings, Sir Harold Acton's biographical memoir of Nancy Mitford. Voinovich's Soviet provinces and Nancy Mitford's smart London of the 1920s—the two settings seem as if they took place on different planets; or, at a minimum, have to do with two different phyla. It was Miss Mitford's father, Lord Redesdale, you may recall, who claimed to have read only one book in his life; the book was *White Fang*. "It's so frightfully good," Lord Redesdale announced, "I've never bothered to read another."

If Lord Redesdale had read only John Hawkes's *The Passion Artist*,[7] I suspect the effect would have been the same, though the cause would

[7] THE PASSION ARTIST, by *John Hawkes*. Harper & Row. $9.95.

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have been quite the reverse. "It's so frightfully bad, I've never bothered to read another." *The Passion Artist* is a novel that only someone bred in an English department could write—or, for that matter, want to read. It is Kafka gone flat and sour. Abstract and arid, paradoxical and puzzling, Hawkes's novel is by turns (and very long turns they seem in the reading) horrifying and boring. His writing provides a gymnasium of symbols—crucifixes, caskets, prisons—in which a certain kind of academic literary critic likes to work out. Here, for example, is Professor Albert J. Guerard, writing about *The Passion Artist* in *The New Republic*: "And now we see, looking back to page 78, that masturbation was a source of anxiety and guilt: 'His fingers on the valves of his trumpet were like mice in a forest filled with snow.' How much more transparent displacement (Hawkes might ask) do you want?" How much transparent displacement? I was not aware that I had asked for any.

What is *The Passion Artist* about? About sex, chiefly. Hawkes has said, "I see writing as an act of eroticizing the landscape." (The more academic the novelist, to paraphrase Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*, the gaudier the patter.) A synopsis of *The Passion Artist* is not possible, though one senses that it is meant to be about the dangers of male sexual repression and the vile consequences of this repression in the exploitation of women. It is a very obscene book, yet rather too psychically claustral to be erotic. A more accurate title for the novel might be *Ten or Twelve Extremely Unpleasant Sexual Experiences.* Critics who are determined to approve Hawkes argue that his aim is to see beauty in the ugly. I myself think he tends to work the other way round, doting too lengthily and lovingly on the humanly hideous. It is, I am afraid, the by now old story: the writer who sets out to be revolutionary but ends up being merely revolting.

John Hawkes may think he is eroticizing the landscape, Philip Roth may be obsessed with sex, but the sexiest writer in America is an older Jewish gentleman living in Manhattan named Isaac Bashevis Singer. For so many contemporary writers, sex is salvation, which is probably why in their novels and stories it is so boring, while for Singer sex is often sin, which is probably why in his novels and stories it is so much more interesting. The stories in Singer's new collection, *Old Love*,[8] almost all have to do with sex: with rabbis whose blood boils in their veins, with lascivious widows, with outlawed passions that refuse to stay submerged. In Singer's work love and sex are often mixed, and throughout his long career he has written about these passions in their various forms and manifestations. Now, as he remarks in a brief author's note, "The love of the old and the middle-aged is a theme that is recurring more and more in my works of fiction." As I say, a very sexy writer, Singer, but one for whom sex is never the whole or even the main subject. The main subject for I. B. Singer is human destiny.

It is, I think, Singer's tireless wonder that helps make him the endlessly readable writer that he is. He never theorizes, he never explains: "It is impossible to explain anything," says a character in the story in this collection entitled "One Night in Brazil," "even why an apple falls from a tree

[8] OLD LOVE, by *Isaac Bashevis Singer.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.

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or why a magnet draws iron, not butter." Singer is a writer for whom plot generally seems as important as, if not more important than, character. I have read nearly all of his books, novels and collections of stories, and, apart from a few exceptions (his Gimpel, his magician from Lublin), I remember scarcely any of his characters with any distinctness. Instead fragments of the world he writes about seem lodged permanently in my head: an earlock blowing in the wind; a delicate Yeshiva boy, weak from too-intense study of arcane texts, brought trembling to the bridal canopy; a ritual slaughterer up to his knees in the blood of animals. Although he seems of late to be writing rather less in the supernaturalist vein, unforgettable too are the dybbuks and demons, imps and harpies of Singer's supernatural stories, stories which read as if every night in the shtetls of Eastern Europe were Jewish Halloween. The village of Frampol, Krochmalna Street in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw, the West side of Manhattan—read enough of Singer and you will feel you have lived in these places.

Increasingly Singer's stories have an American setting, and are chronicles of refugees. His characters are often lonely, haunted; their friends and families have perished in Europe; toting such heavy emotional luggage has bent their spirit, but not finally snapped them. They are sad, and they are comical. A rich Jew living in retirement pronounces Picasso "Pissako," has Mafia connections, but his mind is filled with the degradations endured while hiding from the Nazis in a cellar in Poland with five other men and a woman. "The whole shame of being human emerged there," he says. "If a man is formed in God's image, I don't envy God. . . ." At the close of another story, "The Betrayer of Israel," a mother tells her son, presumably Singer himself, "Such depravities are not for you," when he learns about a Jew married simultaneously to four women who has run off with the youngest of them. But of course quite the reverse is to be true when the boy grows up. "Sexual perversion is the answer to many mysteries," remarks the narrator of the story entitled "The Bus," though the mysteries remain. When asked about the passions of East European women, the same narrator responds, "You know, Doctor, it is impossible to generalize." East European Jewish women quite aside, that is a motto every novelist ought to tape to his typewriter.

In attempting, slowly and not very smartly, to make my way up from the rearguard, I have tried to read my share of recent Latin American novelists, though thus far with poor luck. I made it only half way through *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* by the Argentine novelist Manuel Puig. Talented though Señor Puig clearly is, his novel, alas, is written in that by now quaint method known as stream of consciousness; and mighty muddy waters that stream, so many years after Joyce, now seems to contain. I also belong to a small group of readers—we are practically a cult—who have found themselves unable to get through Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I reached page 183 of that extraordinarily beautiful novel, when I set it aside, never to return to it. I have called the book extraordinarily beautiful, and so it seems to me even now: in it flowers fall from the sky, fireworks go off, every human cleverness is on display. I read my 183 pages with admiration. But I could see no reason to read more.

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"You can have too much," as a character from an Isaac Bashevis Singer story once put it, "even of kreplach."

Demetrio Aguilera-Malta, an Ecuadorean born in 1906 and the author of *Seven Serpents and Seven Moons*,[9] is the devisor of a literary technique known as "magic realism." This magic realism, the dustjacket notes, "is a major influence in Latin American literature, especially notable in the work of Gabriel García Márquez." This did not bode well. *Seven Serpents and Seven Moons* turns out to be about the visit of Jesus Christ, on a singed wooden cross, to the South American village of Santorontón. The novel, along with being the only Latin American novel I have ever finished reading, has some beautiful things in it; it hints at, and at moments even reveals, profundity. Many are its deft touches; several its charms. Turtles pull a boat. Monkeys weep. A mob, stunned by the appearance of a brave man, "felt a kind of whiplash in their eyes." And to cite a short lush passage in Gregory Rabassa's translation:

> Each one picked up a paddle. Clutched it, stabbing the water. The canoe gave a leap. It took on a mustache of foam. It seemed to rise up on that side. And then it shot forward—a huge harpoon—into the womb of the darkness.

The difficulty, though, is that damned magic realism. Under magic realism, as I construe it from Aguilera-Malta's novel, a novelist can abandon realism as long as he does it, so to speak, with realistic detail. One can thus have small incidents such as the following: "He took out his good eye. He brought it close to Candido's face, studying him minutely. Then he put it back into the empty socket." Under magic realism, a man can turn into a crocodile. A boy can have a rose bush grow out of his hand, though the bush will want watering. Christ can get up on and down off his cross. Imaginative writers must work to suspend their readers' disbelief, not rupture it. It may be impossible to generalize, Doctor, but *Seven Serpents and Seven Moons*—and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* along with it—lead me to believe that as a form the novel can stand only a limited ration of poetry.

Jules Feiffer's *Tantrum*[10] need not detain us long. Certainly, it did not detain me long; being, as its publisher advertises it, "a novel in cartoons," it requires roughly twenty minutes to flip through. Mr. Feiffer's cartoons—often political, sometimes social—appear in *The Village Voice*, where they provide a *Peanuts* substitute for the early jaded. *Tantrum* is about a middle-class husband, father of two children, who, tired of behaving responsibly, becomes a two-year old. The book, in sum, is an extended Feifferian performance, which I managed to get through without either the tears running down my cheeks or falling from my chair in laughter. But the notion of a novel in cartoons is an interesting one. I recall Groucho Marx once writing a letter to the editors of *Esquire*, inform-

[9] SEVEN SERPENTS AND SEVEN MOONS, by *Demetrio Aguilera-Malta*. Translated by *Gregory Rabassa*. University of Texas Press. $12.95.

[10] TANTRUM, by *Jules Feiffer*. Knopf. $8.95.

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ing them that, since his eyesight was failing him, he would be grateful if they would print their better articles in large type, their poorer ones in small type. What a stroke of efficiency it would be to carry this notion over into the publishing of novels, with the poorer novels, of course, printed as cartoons.

Obsessive New Jersey Jews, Welshmen, South Africans, left-wing ladies, writers booted from the Soviet Writers' Union, academic avant-gardists, sexy gents in their seventies, Ecuadoreans, cartoonists—is a fiction chronicler's work never done? No, it is not, at least until he has looked in on one younger writer. I am pleased to be able to recommend one such, a writer named Jayne Anne Phillips (born 1952), though I am scarcely alone in thinking well of her work. In fact, I nearly missed reading *Black Tickets*,[11] her recent collection of stories, because John Irving, the *Garp* man, thought so well of it. John Irving, who is a blurbing admirer of John Hawkes's *The Passion Artist*, and thinks Hawkes in a class with Kurt Vonnegut (a judgment with which I should agree), also holds Miss Phillips in high regard—which is proof, I suppose, that in literary criticism, as in roulette, no one can be wrong *all* the time.

Jayne Anne Phillips' stories are firmly imagined, written in a prose style that is quite unlike any other, and for the most part altogether successful in keeping one interested. Although in some of her stories she works for lyrical effects—imagining, as in her story "Snow," the content of the dreams of the blind—she is also very much the slice-of-life writer, interested in the underlife of strippers, prostitutes, heroin addicts, itinerant cowboys, and other down-and-outers. Miss Phillips' slices of life are real slices, stale many of them, hardened, ragged, bugs crawling round in them. If she takes up a subject, no matter how distant it may be from any experience she can have had—"The Patron," for example, is about a male nurse tending a rich and almost completely paralyzed old homosexual—she handles it without, to my ear, any false notes. In "El Paso," the owner of a bar with strippers says of one of them, "She had that hard crumbled look of a dame that's been around but don't know why." In "Solo Dance," a vignette of a page, a daughter visits her father, who, two years divorced from her mother and now alone in the world, gets cancer. It is almost too much like life.

If any criticism is to be made of the stories in *Black Tickets*, I should say that those that deal with the subject of drugs—as does the title story—are the least successful. My sense of it is that using drugs is perhaps the one literature-proof subject in the world—that is, I do not think that interesting literature can be made of it. One might say upon reading descriptions of drug use, that's nicely done, but I suspect that if one hasn't shot heroin or swallowed acid onself one cannot really come along for the trip via literature.

The stories I cared most about in *Black Tickets* may, by today's literary critical accounting, be thought the least ambitious. These are the stories about family life. In them a grown daughter comes home to a widowed

[11] BLACK TICKETS, by *Jayne Anne Phillips*. Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence. $8.95.

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mother ("Home"), or learns that her mother has cancer ("Souvenir"), or goes to lunch on senior citizens day at the neighborhood Catholic church with her divorced father ("Heavenly Animal"). But here is a description of that father:

> He was sixty-seven. Tiny blood vessels in his cheeks had burst. There was that redness in his skin, and the blue of shadows, gauntness of the weight loss a year ago. His skin got softer, and his eyelids translucent as crepe. His eyelashes were very short and reddish. The flesh dropped under his heavy brows. As a young man, he'd been almost sloe-eyed. Bedroom eyes, her mother called them. Now his eyes receded in the mysterious colors of his face.

In a letter to the Brigantine Literary Club, printed at the end of *In Plain Russian*, Vladimir Voinovich prints his response to a high school literary club that wrote to condemn him when its members learned that he was dismissed from the Soviet Writers' Union. In his letter he remarked upon "the true reader," who is someone, according to Voinovich, who divides the books he reads "into the good and the bad, the true and the false. A reader who devours good books either cries or laughs with them and accumulates intelligence, goodness, and compassion for others." If Vladimir Voinovich lived in this country, I would have no hesitation in sending him my copy of *Black Tickets.* I believe he would think very well of it.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Paoli's Boswell

ON THE EVIDENCE OF HIS JOURNALS, in which he records "nineteen attacks of urethritis, almost all of them acute, almost all following sexual exposure, and [?almost all] almost certainly gonococcal in origin (see table, pp. 40–42)," Boswell was an undiscriminating fucker: such is the professional opinion of William B. Ober, M.D.[1] "By applying the retrospectoscope," Ober will also "show a number of ways whereby medical information and insights can illuminate and perhaps resolve certain literary problems," one of which he resolves to his own satisfaction by discriminating between godlike creation and mere slavish copying ("Boswell's virtue for the medical historian is one of his limitations as a writer: he lacked creative imagination. Adept at recreating a scene based on real events, he could not create one out of whole cloth. . . . As a corrective to those who would rate his literary gift too highly . . . "); but literary problems are less to his taste than moral ones: e.g. how to discriminate between undiscriminating and discriminating fuckers—

> One might view these first two attacks as merely the price paid for the exuberance of delayed fulfillment of adolescent sexuality, and dismiss them as nothing more. It is even difficult to fault Boswell for incurring his third attack, as he took reasonable precautions. But during the two years he passed in Edinburgh studying law, he managed to have affairs with four women and to father an illegitimate child on Peggy Doig, a servant girl. . . .

By this time Ober, who obviously gets his jollies daydreaming about high performance and low chambermaids, is worked up enough to quote a "penetrating" remark by Boswell's biographer, Frederick A. Pottle: "he enjoyed confessing so much that . . . the sacrament of penance might have been only another opportunity for self-indulgence"—quite as biographers and critics so much enjoy penetrating their subjects' sex lives that, incapable of sympathy or discrimination, they will say the dumbest things, they will even play doctor, to have a pretext for doing it. "Why," asks Ober, "should a man of good family, considerable education, adequate professional status, a satisfactory wife, and prominent social connections deliberately expose himself to the risk of gonorrhea?" and of course he produces an answer, which needn't detain us.

Like William B. Ober, M.D., Donald Greene, Ph.D.[2] is very cross with, nay hard on, Boswell for his "Castle Hill prostitutes" and his "claps" (is

[1] So styled on the title page of *Boswell's Clap and Other Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979).

[2] Not so styled on the title page of "A Bear by the Tail: The Genesis of the Boswell Industry," *Studies in Burke and His Time*, XVIII (Spring 1977), pp. 114–127.

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bored and peckish with the monotony of it all, demands some color, colors it snot-Greene), erects stiff arguments against Boswell's pretensions to literary significance: "what," ejaculates Greene, "was intended to be the cause of the excitement [when Boswell's journals were first printed fifty years ago]? That of learning the details of the day-to-day existence of a neurotic and not very successful Scottish lawyer and literary dabbler?" But Johnson himself, having read extensively in Boswell's journals, said they were excellently written and continuously entertaining, that indeed they might well be printed *if they were suitable for print*—by which he meant that only their candor about living persons and their freedom of language made them unsuitable. Besides, Johnson regarded Boswell as a lovable man and a good man: "Boswell was never in any body's company who did not wish to see him again"; "If I were in distress, there is no man I would come to so soon as you." Poor Greene isn't content with setting Johnson straight, he's determined not to be taken for a prude so he compares Boswell unfavorably to another randy journal-keeper, Pepys, who (says Greene) "had an enormous and intelligent interest in music, drama, painting, architecture, and much else," but Pepys won't help: Greene is an eighteenth-century specialist and can't be expected to have read anything in the seventeenth, but the hearsay on which he bases his attitude toward Pepys is incorrect—Pepys was an enormously inquisitive man with a lot of self-serving shrewdness, little intelligence, less morality, and no taste at all, whose comments about the arts are mercifully brief and invariably imbecile: *Romeo and Juliet* is "the worst [play] that ever I heard in my life"; *The Adventures of Five Hours* is "the best play I ever saw"; *Twelfth Night* is "but a silly play and not relating at all to the name or day."[3] Greene does, though, rather sound like Pepys when he concludes that Boswell would never have been heard of "if it had not been for his luck in making the acquaintance of Samuel Johnson"—i.e. if he hadn't written the best biography ever. (If Chaucer hadn't written *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales*, he would be far less well known today.) And if Boswell hadn't written the *Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, one of the three best travel books (together with Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy* and *Sea and Sardinia*) in English. And the most continuously entertaining journals ever, mines of observation and discrimination and right feeling—

> Alison . . . told me that he remembered to have seen my Grandfather, a big, strong, Gothick looking man; and that he was present in the General Assembly when . . . some of the young Clergy spoke very slightingly of the Common People as unfit to judge of their teachers, there being a Cause under consideration in which the People were concerned. That my Grandfather got up and said, "Moderator, I am an

[3] For many other equally characteristic quotations from Pepys on many other subjects on which he was equally unqualified to speak, Greene ought to look at my essay on Pepys, "Su Cosa Mi Cosa; or, Busy Busy Busy," in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXIX No. 4 (Winter 1976–77).

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> old Man; and I remember the time when the Gospel was not so easy as it is now. But those who wished to hear it according to their conscience were subject to persecution. Several of those I myself have seen. But amongst them were not many rich, not many noble. They were mostly Common people, whom we here have heard treated with much contempt this day." Mr. Alison said *a Vote* was immediately called, and it was carried for the people by a great majority. He said What my Grandfather spoke had a great effect. He was a man of weight. I was pleased thus accidentally to hear another good Anecdote in addition to many which I have heard of my Grandfather.[4]

Greene, who isn't a specialist in bibliography, may be excused for not understanding that that paragraph is worth more than the contents of all the books and articles listed in the *PMLA* Bibliography of Literary Scholarship of just about any given year; but he really ought to have been told that the four preëminent English writers of the eighteenth century are Pope, Richardson, Johnson, and Boswell.

The quack doctors of literature help us recognize greatness by their instinctive hostility to any sign of it; and so they doubly detest Boswell, who is both great himself and incapable of resisting signs of greatness in others. In 1765, during his grand tour of Europe, having already sought out and interviewed Voltaire and Rousseau, Boswell learned from Rousseau that "The Corsicans have actually applied to him to give them a set of laws," and he grew interested enough to pay a visit to the island where Pasquale de Paoli was leading his people in their fight for independence from the Genoese and the French. Eventually, in 1768, Boswell published *An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island, and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli*, which not only made him a famous writer ("Corsica Boswell") but Paoli a hero to the English reading public and even a force in English politics. Of the three books by Boswell published during his lifetime, the first was on Paoli and the latter two on Johnson: he was a hero-worshipper, and his two paramount and lifelong heroes were Johnson, about whom we know, and Paoli, about whom Joseph Foladare's fine, necessary, and moving book[5] tells us what we would like to know—who he was, why he no longer occupies a visible place in the history of Europe, and (the quacks bristle all their feathers) where his place was in Boswell's life, affections, and prodigious need to admire and be acknowledged.

And where his place was in Boswell's capacity for sustaining as well as attracting the affections of the great and good, so that, when Paoli the exile arrives in London four years after the week that Boswell spent with him in Corsica, their reunion (as Foladare cites Boswell's acount of it in the journals)

[4] 19 September 1778. For many other equally characteristic quotations from Boswell on many other subjects on which he was equally qualified to speak, Greene ought to look at my essay on Boswell, "The Entertainer," in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXX No. 2 (Summer 1977).

[5] BOSWELL'S PAOLI, by *Joseph Foladare*. Archon Books. $19.50.

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> suggests an experience quite as memorable as the first meeting with Johnson. The footman made difficulties; the valet, when he heard "My name is Boswell," gave a jump, "catched hold of my hand and kissed it . . . [and] opening the door of the General's bedchamber, [he] called out, 'Mr. Boswell.' I heard the General give a shout before I saw him. When I entered he was in his night-gown and nightcap. He ran to me, took me all in his arms, and held me there for some time. I cannot describe my feelings on meeting him again" (22 September). . . . Boswell reflected: "As I [had] hardly hoped to meet Paoli in this world again, I had a curious imagination as if I had passed through death, and was really in Elysium. . . . I was filled with admiration whenever the General spoke. I said that after every sentence spoken by him I felt an inclination to sing *Te Deum*. Indeed, when he speaks it is a triumph to human Nature, and to my friendship."

No doubt Paoli's gratitude for Boswell's book, which had been published a year before, played a part; but Paoli wasn't ordinarily a demonstrative man, and Boswell tended to have this electrifying effect on many of his friends (on Johnson for instance). As for Boswell's own transports here, he is shamelessly proud of them, and as frantic as anybody in love, and as usual if not "a triumph to human nature" at least a credit to it: he congratulates himself for his intimacy with such a man, for being *capable* of intimacy with such a man, and he is right to feel so and surrenders nothing of the vividness of his feelings by exulting over his capacity to have them and his need to set them down on the page.

Twenty-three years later Paoli has been back in Corsica for three years, with every appearance of stable temporal power and immortal glory: but it is 1793, and, though Corsica is supposed to be virtually autonomous under the protection of the new French constitutional monarchy, Louis XVI and his family are already under arrest; Paoli's opposition to the extreme measures of the Directory has become unmistakable (three years earlier, "greeted . . . with wild applause" in the National Assembly as he visited Paris on his way back to his homeland, he had been effusively saluted by the deputy—not yet chief executioner—Robespierre: "You defended freedom when we did not even dare to hope for it"); the Buonaparte family (including the young Napoleon), once lieutenants and unbending partisans of Paoli's, are about to desert their leader and Corsica to seek their fortunes in revolutionary France; the Directory is about to issue a warrant for Paoli's arrest; and Paoli receives letters from Boswell that have been delayed for a year and more, which inform him that Boswell is understandably brimming with enthusiasm for political circumstances ("so amiable and so glorious a restoration . . . almost equal to any of the delightful stories of Romance") that have been long outmoded by the dire recent events in France, is pleased by the publication and favorable reception of the *Life of Johnson* (of which he sends a copy), is preoccupied as usual with personal doubts and fears, is stricken often with fits of melancholy (his old complaint, but aggravated by the death of his

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wife the year before Paoli had left England), all of which he confides to the man Foladare properly calls one of his two "surrogate fathers" (and, at that, the kindlier and more instantly forgiving one): "In such a situation, I peculiarly feel the want of your Excellency's most hospitable house in Portman Square, in which I at all times found consolation." "Boswell's appalling obtuseness," comments Foladare,

> in not even faintly imagining the desperate concerns of one in Paoli's situation, his failure to recall that Paoli in his life had one "great object" [the freedom of Corsica]—or worse yet, his implied conclusion that that object had already been achieved—these must have disappointed the General, but disappointment doubtless immediately gave way to sadness. Paoli's reply . . . displays the old warmth but quite naturally places matters in a new perspective, and not only because France had declared war on England some weeks earlier. "When I have a little time to myself I shall send for your *Magnum Opus*, to peruse it and to be in imagination with you and with so many good friends mentioned in it." He writes of the dangerous disease from which he is still convalescing, and of the renewed demonstrations of the people's loyalty and affection. "Through fatal misfortune our nations are now at war. Could they have agreed on their plans all Europe would have become free in a short time. Providence, which rules over the Fate of Nations, will untangle this knot. Our vision is too limited for us to discover the means by which it will bring peace to the poor peoples oppressed by the ambition and pushed to the brink of ruin by the ignorance of their leaders. . . . I embrace you and your sons, and I should like to say a thousand things to your lovable daughters, to make them accept my attentions." Imagine Paoli's not dropping everything to read the *Life of Johnson*! . . .

"Appalling obtuseness" or not—and the term seems excessive for an eternally unsettled young man (not less young or unsettled at the age of fifty-one) pouring out his heart to his loving and beloved "father," even if Papa is at the moment engaged in the task of being the father of his country and the conscience of Europe—nevertheless it didn't turn Paoli sour or distant, *he* wouldn't have called it "appalling obtuseness," because he loved Boswell and didn't feel the obligation to reprimand him for a tactless word or a drinking bout or a tumble with a Castle Hill prostitute.

Foladare's tone is quite on target, however, when he dryly summarizes Boswell's description of the first meeting between Paoli and Johnson, in Boswell's breathless words "illustrious men such as humanity produces a few times in the revolution of many ages" (and the silly man was *right*!):

> Boswell's record conveys nothing earthshaking; but the meeting was satisfactory enough for any admirer of Johnson or Paoli. "They met with a manly ease, mutually conscious of their own abilities and of the abilities one of each other. The General spoke Italian and Dr. Johnson

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> English, and understood one another very well with a little aid of interpretation from me, in which I compared myself to an isthmus which joins two great continents." Paoli, as might have been expected, paid the first gracious compliment, but Johnson lagged scarcely a breath behind. Paoli introduced the subjects for discussion. The first naturally arose from Johnson's reputation as a lexicographer. The second had been set up by Boswell four years earlier in Corsica. . . . On the General's observations concerning language Johnson commented, "Sir, you talk of language as if you had never done anything else but study it, instead of governing a nation." After an exchange of compliments the General "asked him what he thought of the spirit of infidelity which was so prevalent." Paoli now as always showed himself a pious man—no trouble with Johnson here. . . . Johnson went home with Boswell and drank tea till late in the night. He said "General Paoli had the loftiest port of any man he had ever seen."

They never became intimates, but over the next fifteen years (till Johnson's death) they often met at dinner parties and sometimes went off toward a private corner together to worry about Boswell's drinking (Boswell never dared tell Johnson about his whoring, though Paoli had listened to many a tale). There is no evidence of Johnson's ever speaking disrespectfully of Paoli, though in the normal course of a Johnsonian riposte he could figuratively knock him in the head; but Paoli (as Boswell notes) for all his veneration of Johnson could make perceptive if not entirely fair qualifications: "Johnson is like a God who is either damning you or giving his orders with awe. He is not like Jupiter, who lets Thetis sit on his knee and play with his chin"; "What is upright is good for supporting a building but does not ply to other uses"; or, with exasperation, "That damned dictionary-making. He is all definitions"; and Boswell himself, thinking of Paoli's limitless forbearance and responsiveness, remarked in a journal entry that "amidst all my admiration of . . . [Johnson's] great talents, I recollected how Sir John Pringle objected that he had not wisdom for giving counsel." Nobody's perfect.

On June 19, 1794 Paoli, having renounced the authority of revolutionary France,

> in the name of the Corsican people tendered the crown of Corsica to His Majesty the King of Great Britain, represented by Sir Gilbert Elliot as his Minister plenipotentiary. The Assembly named Paoli President. . . . The resilience, the stubborn endurance of Paoli's battered capacity for hope broke forth in his final exclamation: "Blessed, blessed, O my compatriots, the blood which your fathers spilled, that which you yourselves have shed for freedom; blessed the wounds, the hardships, the persecution, all the misfortune that you have suffered for it: here is the fulfillment of the prayers of our forefathers, here is the end of our sighs, our wrongs: *la patria* is free, *la patria* is independent: now there is a Corsica."

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But this great peroration was only the shadow of an already lost hope. Because his mere presence was a thorn in the side of the fatuous and vindictive British viceroy, Paoli had to be "invited" to resume his exile in England; the British would soon ignobly withdraw without a battle; and, under the Corsican renegade Napoleon, the French would retake the island. In London almost all his old friends were dead, and he was among strangers:

> "the contempt which they show toward me here no longer gives me so much pain. I am old; my principal concern must be to leave the memory of my character. . . . I must place my consolation in the hope that posterity will be more just to me, or at least more indulgent. . . . " As for the affairs of the world, he knew no more of them than was reported in the periodicals. "If I had to form a judgment, I would say that there is no likelihood of peace. . . . I strongly fear that this war . . . will spread and endure as long as that which ended in the peace at Westphalia."

The war lasted eighteen more years, till Waterloo, not the thirty he bitterly predicted but long enough. He died and was buried in London; but

> One hundred years after the first Corsican delegation had gone to London to escort Paoli back to his island, another came, this time to convey his remains to Morosaglia [his birthplace]. The *London Times* for 2 September 1889 described the ceremonies, which had taken place on 31 August, in detail. "The exhumation was conducted beneath a marquee erected over the tomb, the floor and sides of which were heavily draped in mourning. . . . " After the coffin had been closed and sealed it was taken from the marquee to a hearse and subsequently to the church of St. Louis de Gonzague, where a requiem mass was conducted. "The church was heavily draped in black, and over the coffin, which rested on the catafalque opposite the altar, was placed a magnificent Roman pall, while at the head was deposited a wreath from the Empress Eugénie, on the ribbon of which was the following: 'Au grand Patriote Corse.' " The coffin then began its long journey home.

While the viceroy was plotting to bring about Paoli's second English exile, Boswell died in London. His editor, Edmond Malone, in a private letter wrote his own Boswell obituary fondly and with the touch of condescension it was impossible for decent but unimaginative people to avoid feeling toward Boswell:

> I suppose you know poor Boswell died on Tuesday Morning, without any pain. I don't think he at any time of his illness knew his danger. I shall miss him more and more every day. He was in the constant habit of calling on me almost daily, and I used to grumble sometimes at his turbulence, but now miss and regret his noise and his hilarity and his perpetual good humour, which had no bounds. Poor fellow, he has

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somehow stolen away from us, without any notice, and without my being at all prepared for it.

Boswell went quietly because, though he was always in search of heroes, he never took himself for one.

Lionel Trilling

CRITICISM AND POLITICS

William M. Chace

For fifty years Lionel Trilling was a major critical presence in America. "He believed passionately," wrote Irving Howe, "and taught a whole generation also to believe, in the power of literature—its power to transform, elevate, and damage." In this first comprehensive study of Trilling's criticism and fiction, Professor Chace demonstrates the range of Trilling's influence and examines his part in America's search for a sense of its cultural self. "Reading Chace is rather like reading Trilling's essays for the first time: one experiences the same sense of a sinuous, resourceful mind at work upon concerns which are as central to our age as they are delicate, elusive, and resistant to simple formulation."—*Thomas Flanagan.* "A fine study, lucid and gracefully written, of one of the two or three critics in mid-century America that mattered the most."—*M. H. Abrams.* $12.95

Stanford University Press

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ROGER SALE

The Men of Sick Europe

> His next great work—which began the move to award him the Nobel Prize—was unequivocally bound up with the idea of death; a book whose greatest admirer would be Heinrich; a book which was to become perhaps the most famous of all novellas in modern European literature: *Death in Venice.*
>
> Instead he began a small novella which would take a further twelve years to complete: a work which would grow from innocent beginnings to become the great *Bildungsroman*, at once literary and philosophical, of the new century: *The Magic Mountain.*
>
> By the time he found sufficient emotional distance to record it, the Republic had fallen, Hitler had launched his 1,000 year Reich, which itself was in ruins, and the death of Julia had come to represent not only a personal loss, but an important thread in a new tapestry whose theme was the fate of an entire nation: *Doctor Faustus.*
>
> Yet Goethe too had not been forgotten. The next year would see two essays on the master; following which—in mid-exile and beneath the storm clouds of war—a Goethe novel no one had ever expected, a unique and sidelong insight into greatness: *Lotte in Weimar.*

Thus the trumpet of Nigel Hamilton brays when he contemplates a new work by Thomas Mann. Seeking hushed awe from his readers, he deserves something quite different.[1]

The Brothers Mann divides its time between Thomas and his older brother Heinrich, who did not win a Nobel Prize and so is seldom given the colon-as-pronouncement treatment. Since this is the first biography of either in English, since Heinrich is not well known outside Germany, since Hamilton means to be full, decent, dignified, and not entirely uncritical, this book deserves some good marks. But its faults are not limited to pompous pronouncements. The fiction Hamilton resoundingly ushers in he then says little about. A few pages maybe about their composition and publication, about the figures who posed for some of their characters, about their public reception, but that's all. In a book replete with quotations, not one is from a novel.

So this is not a critical biography, and Hamilton is not posing as a literary person except in this jacket blurb way of his. The book runs to four hundred pages of tiny print as it is; some decisions had to be made, as apologists like to say. But the decision to sidestep the fiction of two men

[1] THE BROTHERS MANN, by *Nigel Hamilton.* Yale University Press. $16.95.

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whose lifelong occupation was writing fiction is accompanied by another: to be lavish in dealing with the public utterances of both. Thus Thomas' *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, an "interesting" work, I gather (it has never been translated into English), that wrestles with World War I German imperialism, is given much more space than "the most famous of all novellas" or "the great *Bildungsroman* of the new century." Which not only seems a silly choice, but lets us in for lots of public utterance, and Thomas' especially tend to fulfill everyone's idea of the Germanic, either barbaric or subtle to no point:

> "German militarism is in truth the expression of German morality and is not peace that element of civil corruption which appears frivolous and contemptible to it? Germany is warlike out of morality—not out of vanity or glory-seeking or imperialism. Germany's whole virtue and beauty—we have now witnessed it—first flowers in war. Peace does not always suit it—one might forget in peacetime how beautiful Germany is."

> "Which is finer," Thomas asked in *Goethe and Tolstoy*, "which worthier of humanity: freedom or bondage, self-will or submission, the moral or the natural? Which is greater? Which is more aristocratic? I shall not answer these questions. I will let the reader come to his own conclusion in the matter of value, according to his own taste. Or less glibly put: according to the reader's conception of humanity—which, I must add *sotte voce*, will have to be one-sided and incomplete to admit of his coming to any decision at all."

After only a little of this, one begins to long for mere art, or the mucky details of lives.

Katja Pringsheim makes her appearance in *The Brothers Mann* on page 82. Thomas has decided he must marry because he is twenty-eight and beginning to build a wall around himself and his writing. For twenty pages we learn all about Katja, her family, and Mann's shy determined efforts to win her by playing terrier, refusing to let go after he has once nipped her heels. His letters run like this: "And arrogant as it may sound, I regard a person's conduct towards me as a criterion of his inner cultivation"; "A primitive and vital instinct tells me, in a kind of colloquial and unsophisticated language, that emotions of the sort I have for you cannot be in vain." Because of or in spite of the emotions of the sort Mann had, Katja consented after a year of being pursued. At which point she effectively disappears from the book. She and Mann were married almost fifty years, but Hamilton reduces her to breeder and traveling companion, and does so without giving any indication that that is what he is doing. Did Mann treat her as Hamilton does?

Much later we are told that Thomas' and Katja's son Klaus committed suicide. He too had been mentioned hitherto only as being born and occasional traveling companion. Hamilton seems nervous at having accounted so little for what he must report, but manages only to make mat-

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ters worse: "It remains one of the ironic aspects of Thomas' genius that, given the love he lavished on his work, he should sometimes have failed to show it in real life." What would it have been like to be Katja, or Heinrich, accompanying Thomas to Venice in the spring of 1911, and have almost everything happen to him that happens to von Aschenbach in that famous novella? A question to be asked even if no full answer is possible. But Hamilton seems not to care, and my sense is that Hamilton makes Thomas more a monster than he intended, or than Thomas indeed may have been.

Hanno Buddenbrook, who shows us the world as will or idea, or artistic impulse or disease, at the end of Thomas' first novel, reflects the experience of both Mann brothers as sons of the proud, prosperous, and vulnerable Johann Heinrich Mann growing up in the proud, prosperous, vulnerable old Hansa city of Lübeck on the Baltic Sea. All the German passion for dialectic, for constructing life and ideas with dualisms that look like adjacent bowling alleys, was given motive and impetus by their youthful experience as burgher heirs to the House of Mann who stubbornly withstood their father's sorrowful anger and went off to be writers. Even before they had their requisite dosage of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, life and art, bourgeois and bohemian, Hans Hansen and Tonio Kröger, down in the plains and up on the magic mountain, health and disease. For Heinrich getting away from Lübeck was not enough. From Bavaria he wandered in and out of Italy, developed a love of France, became in part the model for Herr Settembrini in *The Magic Mountain*, a passionate republican who became the hero of Weimar and of Germans exiled from Nazi Germany. For Thomas the escape was into art, in conveying an ironic intelligence that could take anything in and leave it neutralized, and if to do that was death-seeking, he could write ironically about that too.

For both brothers the differences between them offered further invitations to tidy dualisms, "culture" and "civilization" being one of Thomas' favorites. Almost everything interesting in Nigel Hamilton's book concerns the relation between the brothers, who were never close as we consider that friends are capable of being, but who were more intimate with each other than with anyone else in either one's life: that too led to dualistic subtleties to no point. Heinrich's life often had to suffer, apparently, by comparison with his brother's. He had a disastrous relation with a woman he wanted to marry, then a bad marriage, finally an odd *Blue Angel* marriage with a Berlin barmaid to whom he was loyal and devoted in spite of or because of her sad losing battles with alcohol and suicide. By comparison Thomas' marriage *seems* settled and satisfying. Though Heinrich was the "civilized" one, an exile early, an opponent of German militarism while Thomas was still defending it, it was Thomas whose works were translated into English (lovingly, too, by Helen Lowe-Porter, to whom Hamilton gives only a curt howdedoo). As a result, when Hitler overran France Thomas came to America as an international literary giant while Heinrich slipped in, lived forlorn and unknown, and was forced to go to Mexico to get his novel *Lidice* published. For many

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Thomas is still a giant, while Heinrich is best known for having written the novel that was turned into *The Blue Angel.*

The judgment is not precisely wrong, but it isn't right either, though one who does not read German cannot say all that much about Heinrich Mann. No one has tried to repudiate Thomas Mann, but gradually, I suspect, his reputation will slip, as 1914–1945 gets further away, as the idea of Europe as the home of culture and civilization necessarily loses currency. To admire Mann as he once was admired, you need to value what he valued as much as he did, and in the way he did, and that is not easy to do.

There is, first, the problem of the novel as a palace of art, of literature constructed analogously to certain musical forms, of irony employed as knowing self-protection. The first two long novels, *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain*, both began as short works that got longer and longer. Mann's way of giving them form was to keep repeating themes and reworking motifs as a way of insisting that what seems like a Rube Goldberg contraption really is under control. The control is there because the themes and motifs are, but in both novels the materials gradually begin to seem negligible, that which must exist for the controlling patterns to be fulfilled. The good citizens of Lübeck were, knowingly or not, right to be annoyed with *Buddenbrooks*, not because it washes dirty linen, or repudiates the burghers, but because of Mann's treatment of everything as though it were an exhibit in a museum of natural history. The only characters with any life are Mann's aunt and uncle, Antonie and Christian Buddenbrook, and they are allowed to live because they are controlled as "comic" figures, parodies of the true Buddenbrook. Antonie's struggles with her two marriages, and Christian's outbursts against his brother after their mother's death are the great things in the novel. The rest is all given over to Schopenhauer, will and morality, and no one suffers worse than does the book's central figure, Thomas, Mann's father. By the time he appears Mann has lost all interest in the life of Lübeck, in people whose lives are governed by moral will. Thus while we are told very late that Thomas loved the life of ships and docks, we never see that when it might have mattered, never are allowed to see him care about anything in that way. Mann has him marry Gerda without a moment's thought, but even the thoughtlessness is never registered, and Gerda is only a cipher, the "art" impulse posited just to place against Thomas' "moral-burgher-respectable" impulse. Mann works very hard writing about Thomas' crisis with his tremblingly frail self as it emerges from the control of his will, but the crisis comes out of nothing, no previously lived life, and exists simply as an insistence of the author.

It might seem as though *The Magic Mountain* ought to work better because there is no pretense there of describing daily life. It's all schemata, Settembrini and Naphta, up here and down there, Hans Castorp and Joachim Ziemmsen, love as contributary to disease, self-willed fulfillment as hedonism and self-denied life as death, art making its triumph out of the knowledge that it has only impoverished materials. It shows more clearly than *Buddenbrooks* that Mann is, and wanted to be, an undramatic writer, like Spenser, someone who takes the materials his history and cul-

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ture offer and gives them fluid and ramblingly controlled celebration. *The Magic Mountain* has no more structure than does *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser, though, had two great advantages. First, his inherited culture was much richer, classical, Christian, and chivalric romance, while Mann only had the nineteenth-century Europe of progress, fleurs du mal, and terror. Second, Spenser could feel his materials, respond to them with intense disinterested passion, so that readers who have no close connection to the classical, the Christian, or to the chivalric romance have something there, stanza-by-stanza, to be in touch with. For Mann triumph, artistic control, and knowledge itself were always a victory over something, at the expense of that something; he knew that too, but that really availed him little. It is bad enough that Mann spends two hundred odd pages with Hans Castorp mooning at his unattained Clavdia, bad enough that their conversation, when it comes, is mostly rolling balls down Mann's dualistic alleys, bad enough that Mann's formulaic irony led him to put the conversation into French. What's really wrong is that this may be the best sustained passage in the book, good as the Naphta-Settembrini "duel" is good, energies getting loose and rattling the museum glass. The rest seems elephantine, a short novel that ballooned out because Mann became obsessed with something Big, with making sick Europe be the subject, and himself the victim, of a fiction of exhausted materials. Its presumed greatness is all willed, its art as naive as it is knowing, its energies sick.

So too *Death in Venice*, which is still read because it is much shorter and can serve the purpose of teachers who want to show the unsuspecting young how clever and contrived prose fiction can be. "And so," Lawrence said, "with real suicidal intention, like Flaubert's, he sits, a last too-sick disciple, reducing himself grain by grain to the statement of his own disgust, patiently, self-destructively, so that his statement at least may be perfect in a world of corruption. But he is so late." It was the lateness that obsessed and paralyzed Mann, the sense that it was all up with literature, music, Germany, culture. It is what, for me at least, makes him seem dated: the doomed Hanno Buddenbrook, Gustav von Aschenbach trailing Tadzio down Venetian streets, Hans Castorp taking nine hundred pages to discover he stays on the mountain to learn "with something like horror that even he let himself go ever so little, fell victim to a contagion so general that scarce anyone in the circle escaped it." "But I hope you do not marvel that the Great Adversary speaks to you of religion," says the Devil in *Doctor Faustus*, "Gog's nails! Who else, I should like to know, is to speak of it today? Surely not the liberal theologian! After all I am by now its sole custodian. . . . Since culture fell away from the cult and made a cult of itself, it has become nothing less than a falling away; and all the world after a mere five hundred years is as sick and tired of it as though, *salvia venia*, they had ladled it in with cooking-spoons." The sort of speech that might amuse in a play of Shaw's in the midst of lots of splendid repartee, but otherwise this need to know where history has led seems only a part of the modern seizure, and since no one needed to seem knowing as much as Mann, in this respect he seems more trapped in his era than Lawrence or Joyce or Kafka or Proust.

There is, fortunately, a but. Mann was the one who had been so taken

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by the youthful beauty of Tadzio, and if in *Death in Venice* he had to swathe that fetching feeling in blather ("Who shall unriddle the puzzle of the artist nature? Who understands that mingling of discipline and license in which it stands so deeply rooted?"), he could also discover that as he went on living his sensuality, his bourgeois love of softness and feeling went on living too. One sees it expressed in a sweet and not simply sentimental tale, "Disorder and Early Sorrow," where the big language of Mann as professor floats out into unanswering air while the brief consoling touching of the young man and the daughter work out early sorrows. It is always in danger of turning to mush, but it was genuine, and led to *Joseph and His Brothers*. Nigel Hamilton calls this Mann's greatest work, as does Erich Heller in *The Ironic German*, but both seem embarrassed by the prospect of that being true, and they hurry past, Hamilton to the anti-Hitler pronouncements, Heller to *Doctor Faustus*. There's not much grit in the *Joseph* books, and there is a good deal of mere wallowing in the sensual. But the love of Jacob for Joseph is much more interesting than is that of von Aschenbach for Tadzio. Mann, seeing himself in Jacob, had to rework *Genesis* a little and make Jacob a victim of Rebecca's desires in the affair with Isaac and Esau. Having done that, though, he could make Jacob into a glowing patriarch, a fulfilled Thomas Buddenbrook or Johann Heinrich Mann, faithfully pursuing his trade and otherwise freed from the northern Lübeck into the love of flesh, of moonlight when the beautiful young Joseph is standing in it, of the desires of a hopeful and seeking Yahweh. Joseph too is fine, the self gradually discovering itself from out of a past of myth and repetition because of surrounding physical beauty and favored status, then discovering its individual mythical power with Potiphar and with his brothers. Though Nigel Hamilton makes no attempt to do so, the real Mann biographer could have a field day working out the multiple and varied impulses let loose in these books. They were written as escape from the terrors of Hitler and the demands for the Nobel Prize winner to make pronouncements in exile. This leads to much Wallace Stevensish playing with sensualities and colors swaddled in a sensual playing with ideas, but it was a real release for Mann, and so *Joseph* is not just information for the biographer but something more consistently and intelligently engaging than anything else I know in Thomas Mann.

At this same time Heinrich also was needing and finding a fixed point in the past to brood upon, and the result was two huge novels, *Young Henry of Navarre* and *Henry King of France*. Heinrich had done something similar during the Great War, when Thomas was still defending German imperialism by calling it other names. He wrote *Zola*, and set himself up as a denouncer of the French army's treatment of Dreyfus as a way of locating and denouncing Thomas' defense of the German army. The two *Henry* novels locate a late sixteenth-century French king who was everything Hitler was not, everything best in what Europe had been. The France of Henry's youth and the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre was as terrible as Nazi Germany, as defenseless against ruthlessness armed with bigotry and ideas. As a result Henry's career must be tragic, trapped when he seeks to

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unite France by taking on the Roman faith, trapped when the mistress he loves must be politically isolated and destroyed, trapped when dreams of a League of Europe must give way to the powerful needs of many to destroy a king who seeks to rule well.

Fictionally these books always seem a little thin, bound to telling the story as Heinrich Mann imagined it actually to have happened and unable to draw Tolstoyan energies from that imagining. But in that sense Thomas Mann is fictionally almost always a bit of a dud, sacrificing experience to the needs of ironic art understood as a credo, and Heinrich never quite gives himself over to *that*. The copies of the *Henry* books I borrowed from the library had last been taken out, and just once even then, in the early fifties. They seem to have disappeared like so much Lion Feuchtwangler. But I read their fifteen hundred pages with sustained if not enormous interest, so let me urge them back into the land of the living, and urge also that those who know brother Thomas only as the monger of sick Europe read the *Joseph* books. What I liked most about Nigel Hamilton's book was the way I could see these two big sets of volumes of the thirties as the work of brothers. But beyond that it offers little. A less hushed and more probing biography is needed. The Manns aren't dead yet, but the way they can be made to live still has not been found.

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JOHN L. HESS

A Mumford Chronicle

THE NOTION THAT HISTORY IS SHAPED BY GREAT MINDS is not flattering to them, for if it were true, then genius would bear the blame for "the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind." It seems more plausible that History chooses for its standard-bearers those thinkers who appear to justify turns it has already taken. Thus John Maynard Keynes has dominated the dismal science for nearly half a century ("We are all Keynesians now," President Nixon exclaimed), but the fiddling with the currency that is now identified with Keynes preceded his ideological triumph, and one still would be hard put to cite a single government that has actually practiced his teaching. Thus also it is evident that Henry Ford, a man of limited intellectual depth, had vastly greater influence on our society than did Lewis Mumford. But how much finer a world would we live in had it been the other way around! That gloomy reflection strikes one again and again in reading almost everything written by Mumford over the last half century and more. Are we now obsessed with the rot of our cities, the cancer of our suburbs, the dreariness of our buildings, the pollution of our environment? Mumford had warned us, elegantly, logically, passionately and in good time. We heard him, and went on with our folly. Yet to read Mumford is, in the end, uplifting. The problems he has posed are still with us, and his answers are as fresh and valid as ever. Further, it is life-enhancing to meet a man of letters, a Renaissance master of our own time, a disappointed but ever hopeful utopian who could write to a lover (in 1930): "Damn utopias! Life is better than utopia!"

My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle[1] is Mumford's twenty-seventh book, a cornucopia of diary notes and letters and poems, including an early poetic memoir. It no doubt was drawn from materials the author used in writing his autobiography—a work he describes as being as candid as Rousseau's, and which he has therefore withheld from publication but may soon release. This one, then, must hold us, and whet our appetite. Another aim of the author, and a pardonable one, is to demonstrate that he was not "only" an urbanist and critic of architecture, as readers of *The New Yorker* and of many of his books remember him, but also a critic and historian of American art and letters, of morals and civilization. And if *The New Yorker* was the platform that gave him his widest audience, it should be noted in passing that his intellectual growth began and flourished in "little magazines" of the 1920s, notably the *Dial*, the *Sociological Review* of London, and the *American Caravan*.

Mumford was born in New York on October 19, 1895, to a cultivated

[1] MY WORKS AND DAYS: A Personal Chronicle, by *Lewis Mumford*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $13.95.

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family of modest circumstances. A bookish boy, he attended City College and Columbia but left before graduation, and although he later taught for many years at Stanford, the University of Pennsylvania, and M.I.T., his approach to academe was always quizzical; it never met his Attic standards. He grew up in an age when the foundations of the arts and sciences were being shattered by explosive discoveries: atomic radiation, the theory of relativity, cubism, Freudianism, Bloomsday. The temper of the times identified progress with change and change with rejection of the past, but somehow, Mumford escaped both the optimism of the technocrats and the nihilism nurtured by the bloodbath of World War I. In a juvenile note at age twenty he wrote, "The greatest task of the Superman is to prevent the human race from committing suicide." Young Mumford fell under the spell of Patrick Geddes, the British utopian and "urban ecologist" whom the writer forever would call "my master." Geddes in turn hailed from Victorian humanists like Ebenezer Howard, William Morris, and John Ruskin, who fought the ravages of nineteenth-century industrialization. Geddes, Mumford reminds us, "distrusted sweeping innovations and clean slates." The phrase is, of course, aimed at the hubris of the opposing, and victorious, school led by Le Corbusier, whose famous plan to raze Paris and replace it by an airy forest of high-rise slabs on stilts has been in part realized at La Défense outside Paris, in Brasilia and in many other modernist failures. In *The New Yorker* in 1957, Mumford penned a devastating critique of Le Corbusier's much emulated "masterpiece," the fearfully costly and foolishly designed Unity House at Marseilles, an uncomfortable luxury dwelling subsidized by the state. He said Le Corbusier's plans for Paris "unconsciously symbolize the inflation of money, the deflation of human hopes, and what one must perhaps call the 'normalization of the irrational.' "

> This last is a characteristic of an age that is busily engaged in the exploitation of atomic energy without first pausing to find a safe way to dispose of its lethal peacetime by-products: an age that in order to insure abundant crops is recklessly poisoning with deadly insecticides and pesticides those who consume the food that has been "scientifically" so saved.

Note (I digress, but to read Mumford is to cover the whole sweep of our contemporary experience) that the foregoing appeared six years before Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*, which awoke the country to the ravages of DDT. And the reference to nuclear wastes was made twenty-two years before the subject reached the national consciousness in the wake of the accident at Three Mile Island. Nor was this Mumford's first attack on atomic folly. That came with Hiroshima. Mumford had shortly before lost his only son in combat, and a loving souvenir of the child forms a chapter of *My Works and Days*. But a diary note says the news of the annihilation of a Japanese city gave the father an "almost physical nausea." He penned an essay for *The Saturday Review* headed: "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!"

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It goes almost without saying that Mumford was an early and eloquent foe of our Vietnam war. He includes here a thunderous open letter to President Johnson in 1965, and the vibrant peace appeal that was his own inaugural address that year as president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Like his master Geddes, he was something of a socialist, but in letters as early as 1930, he observed that Marx, "a grand fellow," had failed to apply his analysis to life under a socialist society, and he expressed fear that a revolution would turn into the tyranny that it fought. He went on to campaign for collective security against Hitlerism, and in 1940 he resigned as a contributing editor of *The New Republic* because of the magazine's neutralist stance. A realist about Stalin, he was also, during the war, remarkably reserved in his private comments on Roosevelt and Churchill.

Like his mentor Geddes and unlike Jane Jacobs, Mumford was a believer in planning—indeed, he was a founder of the Regional Planning Association—and he is honored in Britain as one of those who inspired the postwar New Towns movement. Where Geddes and Mumford differed from the prevailing school was in thinking small. They based their prescriptions on the needs of man, for company, for solitude, for exchange, for air. Thus vest-pocket parks and low elevations, not high rises; thus intimate and balanced new towns, not sprawling suburbs. Thus railroads and parkways *between* cities, not, for God's sake, slashing *through* cities. I find myself flouting Mumford's wish that he be portrayed as far more than a specialist on habitat, because I dipped into this book, as a reader will, while observing the urgent business of the world. As I watched, I was repeatedly reminded that Mumford had said it long before. Do Senators and soldiers calmly debate the mathematics of mutual destruction? Mumford told them thirty-three years ago that they were mad. Do journalists discover that we need electric cars but must improve the batteries? Mumford told them so at least twenty-two years ago. Does the Government persist in spending far more on superhighways than on public transportation, and do the civic fathers of New York prefer a fearfully costly new road to equivalent funds for transit? More than two decades ago, fighting one of the highway projects that would ravage his birthplace, Mumford wrote: "The first lesson we have to learn is that a city exists, not for the constant passage of motorcars, but for the care and culture of men." Does the Government order that thermostats be set at less comfortable levels to save fuel? Mumford long ago denounced the fearful waste of energy in the glass slabs that are still rising everywhere, emulating Mies van der Rohe's "elegant monuments of nothingness."

> The best contributions to metropolitan architecture today have the exquisite appropriateness of a fine meal bestowed upon a prisoner who is to be executed next morning. As with so many other irrational phenomena of our day, like the building of bigger and better nuclear bombs or of wilder and more whimsical counterfeits of motorcars, people have come to regard the pathological as normal, and the more senseless a proposal is in terms of vital human needs, the more likely they are to give hundreds of millions of dollars for its execution.

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He explains why:

> Unfortunately, there is a huge vested interest in raising hell with nature, and there is very little money—in fact, none at all—in letting well enough alone.

That 1959 essay ends:

> If the process goes on, we will wake up one morning to discover that our city has become as helpless and useless as a stranded whale, unable either to swim back to the sea or crawl forward on land. That will be the end—and no jet planes or moon rockets will save us.

I read that passage on the tenth anniversary of man's landing on the moon. On television, Isaac Asimov was saying that civilization would have to colonize space, if it were to survive at all—implying that the earth was no longer a viable habitat. But Mumford is not so despairing. In a 1960 essay he wrote:

> Once we accept the challenge of creating an environment so rich in human resorces that no one would willingly leave it even temporarily on an astronautic vacation, we shall alter the whole pattern of human settlement. Ebenezer Howard's dream of garden cities will widen into the prospect of a garden civilization.

The *Times* of London once called him "the Cassandra of modern technology." But the picture that emerges from *My Works and Days* is that of a rich and happy life. As a man of letters, a colleague of Van Wyck Brooks in the revival of pride in nineteenth-century American writing. As a fortunate monogamist, despite tantalizing hints of episodes of romantic pluralism. As a critic friendly to the new art between the wars, to Fernand Leger and Georgia O'Keeffe, but revolted by "the infantilism of Pop Art and the mindless evacuations of the pop artists."

> In the great periods [he wrote wistfully to Brooks], more was expected of the people than we expect today: they were expected to make more of an effort to reach the highest level, and evidently had enough of an inward life to respect it and reach it. Perhaps the gap was already widening in Shakespeare's time; but the man in the street nevertheless stayed through the whole performance, even if he didn't understand it completely, instead of demanding that all of it be on the level of the clowns; and this was true in Pepys' time, or in Haydn's, when the chambermaids or the serfs could share the same music, and like it.

Mumford is not anti-modern. He is, on the contrary, enthusiastic about the possibilities of new technology, as exemplified in much of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright (though not the Guggenheim Museum). He is not against functionalism, but he denies the functionalism of Le Corbusier

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and the Bauhaus. They, he charges, forgot that the function of architecture was to serve man. Speaking of Unity House, he said:

> The irrational and the extravagant, the morbidly monumental and the empty formalistic are more in keeping with the tone and temper of this age than buildings that are conceived in human and sensible terms. Architecture is thus in the same state as literature or painting—or politics or motorcars.

As with the rest of us, gloom pervades his recent observation of the passing scene—with all the more reason in that he warned us, time and again. But he loves life too much to despair totally, or to leave it without a smile. On receiving the National Book Award in 1972, he said, "I would die happy if I knew that on my tombstone could be written these words: 'This man was an absolute fool. None of the disastrous things that he reluctantly predicted ever came to pass.' "

There is, unfortunately, no danger that that epitaph will be carved. Disasters that he predicted have come to pass and no doubt will recur. But at least he told us why they were happening, and what must be done to ward them off. Perhaps, if enough of us will listen, there is still time for us to save ourselves.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

Poetry, Ego and Self

CARL JUNG'S DISTINCTION between ego and Self kept coming to mind as I read through a number of recently published collections of poetry. While attempting to sort out my thoughts, I came upon Robert Bly's statement in the preface of his new volume of poems.[1] Bly speaks of "two separate energies" which he describes as: "my own consciousness, which is insecure, anxious, massive, earthbound, persistent, cunning, hopeful; and a second consciousness which is none of these things. The second consciousness has a melancholy tone, the tear inside the stone, what Lucretius [i.e., Virgil] calls 'the tears of things,' an energy circling downward, felt often in autumn, or moving slowly around apple trees or stars." If this idea sounds romantic (remember "the pathetic fallacy"?), Bly has revised it with an Oriental bias and made his rediscovery of the unconscious the thrust of his rejection of the confessional mode of modern poetry.

Between the idea and the act, however, falls the shadow. Too many of Bly's poems attempt to overcharge a moment that may have psychic significance but lacks poetic expression. Sample a few random opening lines: "I get up late and ask what has to be done today"; "Here I am, digging worms behind the chickenhouse"; or "Nearly winter. All day the sky gray. Earth heavy." Here is a whole poem, entitled "Walking and Sitting":

> That's odd—I am trying to sit still,
> trying to hold the mind to one thing.
> Outdoors angleworms stretched out thin in the gravel,
> while it is thundering.

The juxtaposition of the insecure consciousness and the melancholy worms and thunder merely illustrates the point, nothing is happening. In these poems Bly mostly walks to his barn and back, looks at his roosters, gazes at farm, field, and sky. Whatever insights such sights inspire in him, he fails to inspire them in us. The dominant season is winter, colored in black, white, and gray; the only people to appear are his parents, equally isolated and remote. The scenes are as stark as an Andrew Wyeth painting, and the aesthetic repetition dulls the senses so that a mindless vacuum like a black hole looms behind many poems. Sometimes Bly catches a moment with the brilliance of a photograph, suggesting something more to be seen. As in "Late Moon":

> The third week moon reaches its light over my father's farm,
> half of it dark now, in the west that eats it away.

[1] THIS TREE WILL BE HERE FOR A THOUSAND YEARS, by *Robert Bly*. Harper & Row. $8.95; $4.95.

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The earth has rocks in it that hum at early dawn.
As I turn to go in, I see my shadow reach for the latch.

At least in the last line the Self has been glimpsed and, as Hopkins would say, inscaped.

Bly wants the deeper, objective Self to rule the subjective, superficial ego. Surprisingly, some of the best post-War poetry has been written by poets who strongly favor the earthbound ego in their poems. Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and Sylvia Plath wrote movingly about their own anxious and cunning consciousness. A poetry of Self cannot ipso facto be judged superior to expressions of the ego. Ideally, as Bly notes, the two must be present in one's best poems, but all romantics know where their hearts lie. Early on, they begin by writing such poems instead of aiming to achieve a wedding of the two consciousnesses; for them only poetry of Self deserves the Muse's coronal.

A perfect example comes to hand in Stanley Kunitz's collection of fifty years of poetry—as he comments, "a stupefying calculation."[2] Like Robert Penn Warren, he arranges his poems in reverse chronological order, but the strategem cannot hide the nature of his poetic development. His early poems launch a direct assault on the Self, using myth ("For Proserpine"), rhetoric ("O Sion of my heart"), and melancholy ("I wept for my youth") as the traditional arsenal for one's siege. No wonder Kunitz decided not to begin his book with such rusty stuff; too bad it had to be included at all. Kunitz began to find his idiom in his second volume, published in 1944, with poems like "Father and Son," although here too the Self-conscious rears its easy head: "At the water's edge, where the smothering ferns lifted/Their arms, 'Father!' I cried, 'Return!' " The exclamation may work, but the metaphor does not. In his 1958 *Selected Poems*, flashes of humor and humanity enliven "The Thief," "The War Against the Trees," and "Rover." Where early Kunitz sounded like late Yeats, the poet discovered his own story and image in the autobiographical "A Testing-Tree," a poem that merits a place in any anthology of modern verse. A late bloomer, Kunitz has fashioned some of his finest poems in the last decade. Ego and Self join hands in "What of the Night?", "Quinnapoxet," "The Lincoln Relics," "The Quarrel," and "The Illumination." Here the personal voice controls poetic intensity, not the other way round. "Route Six," for example, begins:

The city squats on my back.
I am heart-sore, stiff-necked,
exasperated. That's why
I slammed the door,
that's why I tell you now,
in every house of marriage
there's room for an interpreter.

[2] THE POEMS OF STANLEY KUNITZ 1928–1978, by *Stanley Kunitz*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $12.50; $6.95.

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He proposes that he and his wife jump into the car, with their cat, to head for Cape Cod: "We'll drive non-stop till dawn" until they see "Light glazes the eastern sky/over Buzzards Bay." The poem concludes with a simple statement: "The last stretch toward home!/Twenty summers roll by." What begins in ego ends in illumination of Self, light and a sniff of salt air summing up an instant of life more than would acres of solitary contemplation.

Not all poets have to serve an apprenticeship for years before achieving such epiphanies, some are to the moment born. Thom Gunn possesses the poetic gift of an ego open to Self, as a new selection of his poems demonstrates.[3] From the start he found nonce symbols in wound, wind, lighthouse, or looking glass to embody his inner experiences. Both in technique and approach he appeared a traditionalist, but his inspiration and language marked him an original speaker: "I was myself: subject to no man's breath." The familiar matter of "Tamer and Hawk" becomes another experience when we hear the hawk tell us:

> I thought I was so tough,
> But gentled at your hands,
> Cannot be quick enough
> To fly for you and show
> That when I go I go
> At your commands.

Yet the poem does not present a romantic identification of the poet and the bird, rather the hawk represents the ego's true relationship to the Self: "The habit of your words/Has hooded me." The poem concludes with an echo of the scriptural injunction to lose one's life in order to find it: "I lose to keep, and choose/Tamer as prey." The dramatization of two consciousnesses finds its proper emblem for wholeness in the bond between bird and man.

Gunn's "On the Move" and "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death" have claimed attention for their elegant handling of a vulgar subject; in fact, these poems also project the poet's quest "To dare a future from the taken routes." Poems remain in motion so that "One is always nearer by not keeping still," punning the allegory. "The Corridor" describes both a boy's sexual awakening and the awareness of Self so that the keyhole through which the boy spies becomes "a meaning spark" of enlightenment. In the pier glass in which he watches the lovers, he discovers "Two strange eyes in a fascinated face / That watched him like a picture in a book." The poem concludes that no one is alone and each one's vision remains distorted: we are all linked in the glass darkly. The reflected image reappears in "In Santa Maria del Popolo," "A Map of the City," "My Sad Captains," and later poems. A long poem, "Misanthropos," unsuccessfully tries to employ the hindsight of the last man

[3] SELECTED POEMS 1950–1975, by *Thom Gunn*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.

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on earth to give Gunn's viewpoint, but the symbol strains in the unreal, overused situation. The ending, however, has a handsome ring to it:

> Turn out toward others, meeting their look at full,
> Until you have completely stared
> On all there is to see. Immeasurable,
> The dust yet to be shared.

(Yet I miss "Jack Straw's Castle" and wish it had been included instead.) Gunn is a chameleon in his mature poems: a tattoo artist, a woman and cat asleep, a prisoner, a family naked on the beach become the Self that reflects ourselves. A pet dog, hobo sparrow, or cherry tree transmogrify before us.

Any collection of Jorge Guillén's poetry should be welcome, for he is a poet whose inward journey remained strongly individualistic. In the adulatory preface to their translation,[4] Reginald Gibbons and Anthony L. Geist compare him to everyone except the poet he resembles most, Rilke. Guillén conveys the same joy in being in the physical world, a transcendental élan that knows its own limitations. Take these final lines of "A Never-Ending Tale" for example:

> Absolute being, and living,
> Sacred between the two nothings, two voids,
> Being is what counts. I amount to something,
> I am alive. Still!
> Earth beneath my feet,
> Sea and sky with us, together.

Unfortunately, this version lacks the dignity and force of the Spanish. "Being is what counts" sounds like a commercial compared to "*El ser es el valor*," and "I amount to something" hardly compares to: "*Yo soy valiendo.*" At first reading I simply felt sorry for the translators in their impossible task, but on a closer look I see they sometimes multiply difficulties unnecessarily. Guillén can be so compact in language and imagery that interpretation plays an essential part in translation. Without going into every detail, I found poems that stray from the original meaning: "*Del contacto al acto*" does not discuss "conformism" but the poet's lack of "satisfaction" with most human contacts. The opening quatrain of "*Del trascurso*" makes nonsense of the poet's imagery, while the syntax of "*Mundo continuo*" has come unraveled in English. Worse still, the translators mistake "*Veronés*" for Verona instead of the painter Veronese, making mincemeat in the process of "*Mirar y admirar*," a poem about a museum visitor who knows the difference between women in art and a passing flirt ("*Fugitiva*"). In "*Luzbel desconcertado*" reference is made to a "*divo*" not a prima donna, and

[4] GUILLEN ON GUILLEN, The Poetry and the Poet, by *Jorge Guillén.* Translated and with an introduction by *Reginald Gibbons* and *Anthony L. Geist.* Princeton University Press. $15.00; $5.95.

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the message of "*Carte urgente*" is not that "You miss me" but "My love is still with you." The real problem, however, arises from the over-editing of the book, less than half of which contains poetry. The main divisions strike a pompous note: they are the two dates on which the editors interviewed the poet at his "kind invitation" (!). These comments loom larger than the poems as Guillén's chatter reveals less and less: "Is that clear?" he asks. "This poet has the bad reputation of being obscure. It's not all that obscure!" Guillén revised all personal references into the third person so that the conversation appears detached and awkward. The preface itself runs from academic banality with a paragraph beginning: "Thus we do well to look to the formal texture of Guillén's poetry for the sense of physical presence which is so vital and impressive in his work," to outright misstatements: i.e., that "the Spanish government awarded the Miguel de Cervantes Prize for Literature" to him, when it was in fact, and very significantly, the combined Academies of the Hispanic nations that made the award, and that *Cantico* was "originally the work of Guillén's youth," when in fact he began writing it in his late twenties. The editors do the poet a disservice by these distortions, and having come to praise their master, all but bury him instead. The poems of Guillén which begin with awakening and end with union will outlive such follies.

In his first book of poetry, Ralph J. Mills, Jr. expresses a sadness about the sameness of life, but his verse shapes an affirmative response.[5] The tears in things are touched by sunlight and the dead remembered in healing dreams. Nature's transformations take place around us, in the morning mist turned to rain and bare elms "splayed motionless in the sun's amber," but magical change is also present in the death of loved ones and in our own growing older. "Back Again" opens with a bird calling "from the green paradise of elms / slowly aging" and the poet feels himself take wing at the call. However, he is no Keats or Shelley:

> A red seam of light opening edges along
> the horizon
> gives my life back again as if it were mine,
> bobbing high on its string
> above the broken crests of lake water.

The poet is just a child's kite in a world that is still shattered and fragmentary. The same theme makes the poem "Here" more than the ordinary spring-Easter bucolic of traditional poetry. Mills graphically describes the tongues of leaves tasting sunlight and the bones clicking on their way to the grave. He catches a glimpse of himself:

> I turn from the mirror, seeing my father's face
> again in mine, tired of the deceit,
> of my days unfolding into air, the same words,
> traps of emptiness yawning underneath.
> The table's edge drops off in space.

[5] LIVING WITH DISTANCE, by *Ralph J. Mills, Jr.* BOA Editions. $7.95.

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The poet, insecure and earthbound, wonders whether the risen Christ is here, in sunlight, an old woman, a sleeper's breath. In the last stanza, he finds a limited peace by gazing at a Harry Callahan photograph of three white stones bedded in dark grass:

> Sometimes I stare until the glass dissolves
> and I've stepped through,
> the tall blades springing back after I pass,

until he lies down "and being here, don't look ahead or behind." Mills finds rest only rarely; usually he's on foot in the afternoon woods, under stars, or driving through familiar towns. One of his recurring images is the road, asphalt-covered and white-lined, a symbol of our facile confidence in getting there without knowing where we are going. "Walking" captures the colors of nature in wildflowers and mountains as the poet strolls through the woods, only to come out on a road, "the tarred surface /relentless as the perfect white band / dividing its middle." Like the black and white photograph, however, these highways and bridges lead the traveler to an unknown destination:

> Evening spills through
> tangled branches, the street
> dances faintly now
> with moonlight—
>
> I'm fumbling, loose on its path,
> growing older,
> but helpless almost as the child
> I was
> and shy of the dark.
> "Winter's End"

"At the middle way" of his life, Mills finds comfort in the snow, beech leaves, and evening wind, in the dream-presence of the dead, and in his own journeying. What one misses in the narrow path of this pilgrimage are other people, those chance encounters that made Dante's ghosts flesh and blood speakers. Mills's monologue needs to become more of a dialogue if he continues this quest for the mysterious, unconscious Self.

Spencer Brown's title poem, "Child's Game, On a Journey," describes two children on a bus playing "the simple and old game / Of paper-stone-and-scissors."[6] The poet watches the game which employs fist, fingers, and palms in a war of reflexes and wits where the loser has his wrist slapped. The drama becomes an allegory of man's helplessness to stop when anything—war, game, bus, even poetry—has been set in motion, "As the bus runs forward and backward into time / And the game goes on and on." Brown uncovers a number of such incidents in order to imag-

[6] CHILD'S GAME, ON A JOURNEY, by *Spencer Brown*. Elizabeth Press. $22.00; $10.00.

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ine the inner story: "Law of Gravitation," "Journeying West," "Morning at Hilo," "National Park, U. S. A.," "The Back-Packer," and "The Blind Lead the Blind." "Steller's Jay" recalls a visit to the zoo with a four-year-old son and then flashes to the present where the poet discovers in a jay's stealing what he would be given anyway an emblem of "things as small as men" (the ego) and in "the brown and rough / Knuckle-fist of a sequoia's vertical bulk / Pressing the earth, leaping skyward," a symbol of Self. "Inner Depth" employs the image of deep-sea diving as a parable of marriage, encounter with the anima as mermaid, and return:

> By vast, tortured thrashing I ascended
> In heavy lava and dispelled the depths,
> Shattered the ocean and came up to air,
> Gasping and gasping to still my thundering heart.

At the last, he knows he will descend again to drown, and he can only wonder at human courage: "How do we dare go down these waters nightly?" Brown chances some doubtful rhetorical questions—and answers—in his poetry, but one admires his freedom from poetic fashion and his wish to express in his verse experiences of the heart rather than games of the intellect. "The Dam" offers another parable in the form of a descent from a lake, down a ravine to the botton of a dam where the poet suddenly feels at the mercy of the wall of water and is gripped by fear, until he braves a slow climb to safety. He may walk the top of the dam again, but he will not go down the same ravine alone. " A Day in the Tetons" tells of climbing among flowers, animals, streams, trees, and rocks, only to bring resentment home because of the ironic contrast between the two worlds: "I grudge the grandeur / That has deprived me of my common joys. / I have been too rich and royal for a day." While the last line overstresses the obvious point of the poem, the thought, as in other poems ("Snowman," "Veterinary's Office," and "Public Beach"), comes directly from personal observation. Sometimes the preacher does get the upper hand, especially in "At the Groundbreaking for the Tate Library" and "Plane Geometry," and the rhetorical overwhelms the imaginative. "Service," on the other hand, manages a triple pun on telephone, undertaking, and religious "services" while still eulogizing the poet's father; thanks to details, exact and moving, of everyday rituals, the poem lets the message speak for itself.

Lionel Kearns is a poet who translates ordinary events into original expressions and writes an occasional poem with humorous skill.[7] "Public Poem for a Manitoulin Island Canada Day" satirizes patriotic celebrations, McDonald hamburgers, banality, and poets reading their poems for a fee. The six-part public poem is followed by a long private one that deepens—or heightens—the satire by looking inward to press the poem or picture outward: "the forms and flowers and things" that someone will somewhere, sometime, "come upon and learn and know / how you felt to

[7] PRACTICING UP TO BE HUMAN, by *Lionel Kearns*. Coach House Press. *np*.

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be alive." A childhood innocence, bordering on naiveté, sustains this and other poems, but a concern for language keeps them from being slipshod. In "Semantics," "Definition," and "Language Dreams," Kearns joins this concern to a firm grasp of events as symbolic. "Ritual," for example, describes a boy launching stick canoes in a roadside gutter during a spring run-off, while a grown man watches, remembers, and sees himself joining the boy in an unchanging ritual each spring "as the warm wind /melts the old snow" and "bares leaves and grass / to the pale bright sun." Childhood trauma and a father's presence of mind make "Part of What it Means" an action-filled story and an interpretation of life. Kearns's companionship with his own son is cleverly summed up in "Relationship" and "Channels of Culture: Time into Space." Several striking poems about Indians obviously arise from actual occurrences rather than wishful thinking. "Magic Indians" recounts the disappearance of Indian lacrosse players just before a crucial game; "Event" involves a sick Indian girl found in the street by police; and "Geneswirl" describes a colorful half-breed holding forth in a bar. Kearns cannot resist a certain didacticism that almost ruins "Event" by informing the reader that he is not reading the poem, but "This is an actual event / and we are both here watching it now." The poet gets carried away in some poems, like "Recycled Poem" and "Trophy," to the extent of ending with explicit ruminations about "What is this to you?" and "Where is that father?" or "Where is that place?" The poet's task is to make us feel and wonder, not tell us what to think. Some critical advice or editorial comment might have made this collection a better one, without restraining Kearns's natural talent and massive exuberance. Despite excesses—or because of them—poems about comic seduction like "Making His Point" and instant satori like "Hockey is Zen" establish this Canadian poet as a unique writer whose work deserves attention.

Kenneth Koch has had less trouble getting attention for his flighty excursions into poetry since the publication of *Ko, or a Season on Earth* in 1959. His latest book of poems (his seventh) contains only ten poetry and prose pieces, some of them vintage Koch and some sour grapes.[8] The poet takes a nostalgic and narcissistic look at himself twenty-five years ago, fresh from Europe, falling in and out of love, devoted to famous-to-be friends. Koch's anxious ego shines pure, untarnished, and undistorted, and his best poems breathlessly report what he sees in memory's mirror. When the humorist turns instructor and commentator on our mores, however, the poet plops into his glassy pool and drowns in words. About two-thirds of the way through this volume, I thought Koch sunk for good in his own ground swell when he recovered with a poem on the very topic of his seriousness, entitled "The Boiling Water." It defies summary, except to say that the subject really is boiling water and it is hilariously serious. How important for the water to boil, how right for the poet to describe it, and how essential that we read the poem! Something starts to boil in the

[8] THE BURNING MYSTERY OF ANNA IN 1951, by *Kenneth Koch.* Random House. $7.95.

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mind: "Serious the birth (what a phenomenon!) of anything and / The movements of the trees, and for the lovers / Everything they do and see." And he adds: "Serious intermittently for consciousness / The sign that something may be happening, always, today, / That is enough." In some poems Koch brings his impressions to a premature boil and in others he bubbles without ever reaching the point. He cannot resist an aside, a further correction or reflection, or the kitchen sink. "Our Hearts" runs on about government, civilization, the human condition, the modern Self, in a kind of parody of Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *Quartets*. Koch's mastery of non-stop conversations sustains "Fate," a reminiscence of a day in the lives of the New York School of Poets and Painters. The title poem fails to get beyond its pastiche technique, and "The Language of Shadows" collapses in its own Abstractions. "The Problem of Anxiety" bounces right back with a spirited analysis of the causes and remedies of insecurity and despair. Koch's examples—from a shipload of soap to protracted head-shaking—so involve us that even completing the poem becomes a subject of concern; the piece is a real tour de force. "Reflections on Morocco" begins with some Monty Python antics and moves on to an interview with a Moslem interviewer, resulting in some of the best insights I have read into Arab thinking, worlds away from our Western culture. The final poem, "To Marina," tells a love story simply and complexly, recalling twenty-five years of change: "I am over fifty years old and there's no you— / And no me, either, not as I was then, / When it was the Renaissance" and everything was still possible. A very satisfying poem.

Many things are possible in Mekeel McBride's young world and her first collection accomplishes a number of them.[9] In "The Keeper of the Sea" she affirms her belief in a heroic world where half-Indian Marlon Brando rescues her from danger, "sunning me from under the soft wave of his blue hands." Like the umbrella she carries, he represents the archetypal Self that rescues her even while she knows everyone she loves is going to die. In "Black Boy's Death by Drowning," the poet becomes the dark speaker who dies not in the abstract but in a true incident: "I am the one who got away / thin as the reeds that surround me." Like Billy among the Darbies, the voice from the dead reinterprets the world of ropes and weeds where we all lie entangled. Ms. McBride writes objectively about being a woman without stereotyping; she finds new allegories to tell old tales. "The Knife-Thrower's Wife" is an exciting story of marital hatred and a profound parable. After a description of the husband's wrath, the circus act follows:

> He places his blindfold carefully. He aims
> as close to her heart as he can. And then
> it is over. She steps forward, sees
> her silhouette set out by ice-pick,
> sword, all manner of sharp things. She
> joins hands with her husband. They bow.

[9] NO ORDINARY WORLD, By *Mekeel McBride.* Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $8.95; $4.50.

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In the last stanza, the wife realizes that the love of knives is more than the love of life, his or hers, and that she is part of the ritual, "glad for the knives / that need her." A powerful conception governs the poem. Some verses let sentiment take over, however; "The Need to Talk" ends too neatly with the poet's head on the table and the wish "there were / someone here to talk to." Similes also get the upper hand in the same poem: "My shoes / surround me, paired like couples / at a private funeral /each with their own reasons for walking away." "Learning to Untie the Knots" makes a false start with an unlikely simile, but the portrait of an insomniac father has pathos and particularity:

> Ahead of me he has found his way
> into the dark by following
> torn curtains, table tops, chairs,
> feeling how everything he touches now
> might have been more.

Nothing at all controls James Tate's choice of metaphors, similies, images, or statements in his new book of poetry.[10] The title poem, "Riven Doggeries," reads like a page from the comics: "The dog has leapt / from my seventh-story apartment / into a Police helicopter / that had been hijacked / by some murderers." What else is new? Like verbal doodling, whatever pops into the poet's mind crops up in the poem. Tate has a fine ear for inane colloquialisms and absurd figures of speech, but this volume is a far cry from the austere beauty of *Absences* and its probing of the Self. Perhaps success, which gives even the most sensitive poet second thoughts about his own seriousness, has caused Tate to become too cunning and whimsical. The poor dog, in case you were wondering, "doesn't exist / he won't come back." Nothing goes right: "Some star / fell down on her and so what" ("Heartstroke") or "We're in the wrong place, our favorite season" ("With a Child All Day"). Sometimes a ray of satire peeps through, as in "The Life of Poetry":

> Self is to be commended for correct
> adult deportment at self's recent funeral
> (except for ignoring the no-smoking sign).
> Pass the sweet, Salty, it is morning:
> the streets are tilted and rocky,

but even here the humor becomes sophomoric. "The Long Loon of Democracy" describes the world as a library of fire where we are all trapped while a war goes on outside: in the lobby trained midgets wait with bats to greet us. Tate cannot resist a pun: what kind of bats? "Early Tibet makes a man rise" ("The Major Cleft"); "His clock has stopped watching" ("Time X"); or "The Powder of Sympathy." Some prose poems have a Poe-like artistry that marks them off from the other poetry: "Across the

[10] RIVEN DOGGERIES, By *James Tate.* Ecco Press. $7.95.

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Heaven" dramatically retells the fate of a pedestrian hurled into the air by a speeding car, while "River Story" is an Indian-like tale about a trickster river and a Veronica Lake. "Daydreaming in the Forge" almost sounds an autobiographical note: "I had mad thoughts and insoluble anguish, begged to survive intact without the grace of wit, without the freedom to please, without this landscape disease." An uncomfortable truth of inner chaos underlines some lines so that the poet's own insecure ego seems to be the subject of scorn. Perhaps not. In "The Prince at Amherst" one may find a clue to what these poems intend: "The audience / cracked up and had to be carried out / in orange crates." Written for public readings, poetry can be played for laughs. Many of Tate's poems make sense only if they are seen as performances, to be heard but not understood, to startle but not to be scrutinized. As the poet himself observes in one revealing remark: "We won't / get anything so don't expect anything."

Allen Grossman is another poet orbiting in a celestial path different from our own. His collection of poems moves from classical and biblical themes to contemporary concerns with surreal abandon: the results are equally uneven.[11] "Alcestis, or Autumn: A Hymn" opens with a moving confession that the poet has all his life been accompanied by "a satyr to my stolid / Pain and strange virginity." This inimical, earthbound consciousness has gone, but now the Self must play its part or be diminished by the loss. The poet reflects:

> After some years
> A man becomes a mystery, and walks the bottom
> Of the stream where no one meets, for all
> Are one way flowing. After some time,
> A man is claimed by time; and all the gods
> Withdraw into the things from which they came—
> Into wildflowers, and bright stones, and shells.

In the eight sonnet-like poems that follow, the poet seeks a Venus to preside over the second half of his life: "What must be learned is how to love; / But where are the Schools, and Masters of the / Discipline?" The queen of love promises winter rather than spring, yet he still prays:

> Purest mother of perpetual mourning,
> I am so wholly yours I am not mine.
> The dead are restless; but the living feel
> More pain—in their uneasy wandering.
> There is no man betrayed except by you.

Not much hope remains: "Sweet lady, thy children are about to die, / And come to thee—the holocaust of history." In the last poem of the sequence the poet resolves to inquire into death "until the Spring / As-

[11] THE WOMAN ON THE BRIDGE OVER THE CHICAGO RIVER, by *Allen Grossman*. New Directions. $8.95; $3.95.

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tounds me with its bells, or else the Winter /Deepens, and stars usurp the world." Since neither gods nor goddesses gave him his solitude—his own psyche discovered it—"None can undo, therefore, that mighty work." We are not to end on an exalted upbeat, however, for deep within that psyche is "insanity / Bestial, passionate, secular, and profound." The series comes full circle to the satyr-ego that departed in the first poem. Hyperbole may be overlooked in a work so pitched in its mythy mindfulness, but Grossman gives over to extremes in other verses. He raises the Muse to the sky, then treats her as nothing. He is fond of "unwriting," a poetry-does-not-matter mentality, and he revels in negatives. "The Thrush Relinquished" begins "One night there was no moon, and never had been" and goes on to declare: "No poetry tonight. Death tonight." First lines announce the same non possumus: "He resolved to say nothing he did not know" ("A Cloudy Night"); "I do not live by the sea" ("My Markman"); and "'I have become Death, shatterer of worlds' / (You do not read, I do not write this verse)." The girl in "The Holdout" who will not play but takes her ball and leaves typifies the persistent nothingness of Grossman's aesthetics. The final poem, "The Lecturer," pictures a man who speaks to an audience at the sea's edge only to have trees and sea disappear; finally, the man stops talking—silence, with "no night," "no thunder"—and no man? Grossman has looked at the stars so long that he speaks to the cosmos and not to mere mortals. When he does momentarily address us, in the title poem, "The Woman on the Bridge Over the Chicago River," his lines have a singular, unearthly quality:

> Stars are tears falling with light inside.
> In the moon, they say, is a sea of tears.
> It is well known that the wind weeps.
> The lapse of all streams is a form of weeping,
> And the heaving swell of the sea.

"The Runner" opens with a dreamy evocation: "The man was thinking about his mother / And about the moon." As he runs, the moon rises and his mother joins him, running with him "like a man and his shadow." A man's anima will catch up with him, "smelling of rain" and they will run on "all night, together." Two poems, by the way, are charmingly anecdotal as if to prove that even star-gazing academics can unbutton. "The Department" offers a tongue-in-check eulogy for a cracked colleague and "a lousy driver"; "Pat's Poem" recalls a childhood nurse with affectionate banter.

David Wagoner's eleventh poetry collection introduces a further range to his writing, with childhood memories, humor, satire, and poetry itself serving as additional topics to his love and nature interests.[12] The book is divided into three sections from personal, public, and nature themes. The boyhood scenes in "Boy Jesus," "Jeremiad," "The Junior Highschool Band Concert," and "My Father's Wall" possess a frank wit and honesty

[12] IN BROKEN COUNTRY, By *David Wagoner*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $8.95.

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that is refreshingly direct. "My Flying Circus" accurately details a boy's room hung with model planes; "their silent engines / And innocent machineguns / Stalled and hung-fire till dawn." "Part Song" brings another surprise, visitors and patients listening together at a nursing home's Thanksgiving party as the janitor sings "Trees" "Better than anyone could have hoped for." A tuft of thistledown that drifts in and out of a parked car, goldfinches flying about after a cloudburst, a recollection of Theodore Roethke digging in his garden, a woman's grief: poem by poem, moments of love float before us impeccably expressed and thoroughly felt. Five incredible physical "Stunts" are detailed in one series; they must be read to be believed. A panhandler who cries "God Bless You" when given a quarter receives an answer in one poem, and a garbage fill provides a meditation for another. "Thawing a Birdbath on New Year's Day" catches our immediate attention:

> At the crack of dawn my feet are crackling
> Where the lawn in the night turned into broken glass
> As the year turned over harder than ever.

The poet pours hot kettle water on the iced-over birdbath, then, indoors, watches for an hour while birds return as they did in summer:

> If anything's worth remembering in that garden,
> They know it, without petals, down to the thorns,
> Down to both sides of leaf-like skeletons.

Wagoner knows it too, for nothing escapes his human eye until, finally, "Slowly the ice comes back, feathery, thin," and the birds scatter once again. Hunters, trappers, logging firms, and trophy-posers each receive their hard knocks in a trenchant group of poems; no romantic vision of nature can suit the modern poet since our awareness of Self has expanded. The last poems take up Wagoner's favorite subject, hiking the woods and desert and scaling precarious heights. At the same time as these poems act as allegories of the psyche's encounter with the lonely, encompassing unconscious, they exist as literal accounts, rich in observation and advice, of personal experiences. Each poem tells its own tale and Wagoner never repeats himself in spite of the concentration of his subject. Finding you are lost or at an impasse and learning to read the natural signs around you form the chief matter of "Walking in Broken Country," "Climbing Alone," "Crossing a River," and similar poems. "Finding the Right Direction" in two long sentences leads the reader by stones, slopes, and trees, under a sunless sky, homeward. Once you make up your mind keep on moving, we are told in "Living Off the Land," "Reading the Landscape," "Seeing Things," and "Looking for Water." The desert also awaits us and we must interpret its contours and drifts. "At the Point of No Return," we learn:

> Till now, you could have taken back your steps
> Like slips of the foot:

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They were turning points where, more easily than not,
You could have given up,
Gone back to the start, forgotten, tried something different.
But from here on
It will take more courage to turn than to keep going.

Now you are "committed" (the word has been rescued!), only one way remains, the one you are on. Wagoner wants to prove himself a good guide, however, and he encourages, instructs, and leads. Finally, you must stand, "Ignoring all directions/But your own," finding freedom in the open spaces and moving onward. "Getting There" brings us to the end of the journey and the book: "You take a final step and, look, suddenly/You're there." The poet passes on a last piece of advice and a word of praise:

Like wind etching rock, you've made a lasting impression
On the self you were
By having come all this way through all this welter
Under your own power,
Though your traces on a map would make an unpromising
Meandering lifeline.

The poet speaks to himself and to his reader when he observes: "You've earned this worn-down, hard, incredible sight/Called Here and Now." He concludes with a vision of the whole way:

Now, what you make of it means everything,
Means starting over:
The life in your hands is neither here nor there
But getting there,
So you're standing again and breathing, beginning another
Journey without regret
Forever, being your own unpeaceable kingdom,
The end of endings.

Without doubt, this collection merits recognition as the finest work of a major poet.

Robert Pinsky has written a book-length poem to set down his vision of our country and its experience.[13] In its philosophical approach, classical learning, and orderly structure, the poem resembles the work of William Cullen Bryant more than that of Hart Crane, but it is not old fashioned. It is as American as Bryant's and Crane's long poems, as embedded in the past, and as identified with the woods and prairies. Does America have an explanation? More basically, Pinsky says, we need to ask: Is there a country to explain? Yes, but not out there: in our own imaginations and dreams, in the unconscious Self made conscious by poetry which gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name. In fact, Pinsky finds the

[13] AN EXPLANATION OF AMERICA, by *Robert Pinsky*. Princeton University Press. $7.50; $2.95.

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paradigm for his poem in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* which he calls "A Romance of implausible rebirths." The definition applies to America where the old world serves as womb for the new: Greece and Rome, England, Spain, and Russia serve their ingredients into Pinsky's pot. He is too modest to pretend his poem to be an epic; instead, he writes it as a letter to his daughter who by happy chance plays a part in a school revival of *The Winter's Tale*. Images reappear repeatedly in the mirror, past into present, public to private, concrete to universal. The poet loves the railroad, for example, but welcomes cars and highways as literal vehicles of shaping a myth of uniqueness: "Yet some day, tamed and seasoned, our machines/Might make plain that America is a country." Just as Gogol explained Russia as a troika, so "The communal speed of trains and happy freedom/In a car are like the troika," for speed makes plain the size and pace of change. The triadic myth, which goes back to Plato's chariot drawn by three horses, is central to Pinsky's plan to define the boundaries of American space and time. He directs his explanation through local history and landscapes, generations on the land and in cities, in their waking and dreaming life. His work has three parts: "Its Many Fragments," "Its Great Emptiness," and "Its Everlasting Possibility," which correspond to past, present, and future, and each part has four sections. Except for the two lyrics that open and close the long poem as a preface and final dedication, the whole is written in blank verse and includes a translation of one of Horace's Epistles.

Pinsky has seen the country grow older, changing for better or worse he cannot say, especially during the Vietnam War. It may still be buoyant as a young girl playing Shakespeare or it may have aged like a prisoner. "Mysteries of the Future," section II of Part Three, opens with a dazzling tableau of people streaming from church on a bright winter Sunday morning. Are they free or slaves to convention? What are they doing here, like science-fiction travelers through time:

> It is Chicago; and though in many ways
> It could be some place in another country,
> The way I see the people and the church—
> As mysteries, not just unknown or foreign—
> Make it this country: and Chicago, a setting
> We make as we discover.

This section ends with an eloquent epitaph for a black slave who died in 1773 (before America's independence): "*God wills us free, man wills us slaves.*" Born free, he lived a slave until death freed him and made him the equal of kings. We must be "naked, free, and final" to frame words "as if speaking from the past/Into the void or mystery of the future." Pinsky come close to fulfilling the ideal himself when, at the close, the poem itself recedes into the past, having offered for our quiet reading a work very much like the country it explains, "not a mystic home/But something—if it must be imaginary—/Chosen from life, and useful." Something we look for in all the poetry we read.

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JAMES P. DEGNAN

Cowboys and Crazies: The American West, Then and Now

THAT MANY REGARD CALIFORNIA as the national center for craziness is hardly surprising. After all, in just over a decade, California has given the world, to mention only a few contributions: the Flower Children, the Manson Family, the Hippies, Primal Scream, Rolfing, Arica, Sufi, UFO, Sandstone, Sunburst, the Black Panthers, Patricia Hearst, Huey Newton, Ph.D.'s in Consciousness, Esalen, Jim Jones, Jesus Freaks, Jews for Jesus, Gay Marches, the Hookers' Ball, Zen Catholics, Jerry Brown, Werner Erhard, Chuck Diedrich, Fritz Perls, Transactional Analysis, Marathon Encounter Groups, Rod McKuen, Michael McClure, Harvey Milk and Sleeping Sam Hayakawa.

"If it babbles and its eyeballs are glazed," says Chicago columnist Mike Royko, "you can bet it's from California."

Cyra McFadden's *The Serial*[1] and Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*[2]—trendy little soap opera novels—seem to have been written to corroborate the opinions of people like Mr. Royko.

The Serial satirizes California's well known (thanks largely to cartoonist Garry Trudeau) "Mellow People," fairly affluent, young middle age, totally self-absorbed people obsessed with the search for "personal growth." They are Tom Wolfe's "Me Decade" people, constantly and comically "into" things. They are "into" Silva Mind Control, Gurdjieff Therapy, Assertiveness Training, Renaissance Fairs, Moog Synthesizers, Creative Divorce, lentil loaves, fertilized eggs, Motobecane ten speeds, and mountain top weddings with readings from Kahlil Gibran and music from the score of *Elvira Madigan*. In lampooning these people, Miss McFadden is at her best in getting at their language—California "Mellow Speak." The people who populate *The Serial* are forever babbling about being "laid back" and "going with the flow" and "kicking back" and going "where the energies are." They "dialogue" about giving parties that are "dynamic but unstructured"—parties that are "off the wall" and that the guests "can really get down on." They "mutate" about the years they have spent taking classes in orgonomy and Human Life Styling. They "process" their ex-spouses. They spend much time trying to "get their heads together" or wondering "where their heads are at" or trying to determine where their peers are "coming from, I mean, you know, spacewise." They constantly "restructure their commitments"; avoid "intellectualizing" or being "judgmental"; "evolve" or "flash on new options"; and "relate to" things like millet stroganoff and soybean canapes.

Mr. Maupin's people from *Tales of the City* are also "into" things, but

[1] THE SERIAL, by *Cyra McFadden.* Alfred A. Knopf. $4.95.
[2] TALES OF THE CITY, by *Armistead Maupin.* Harper & Row. $5.95.

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things a bit more sinister than Personal Growth and natural fibers. Mr. Maupin's people, mostly San Francisco homosexuals (of both sexes) or bisexuals or pansexuals are "into" SM bars, whips and chains, gold brocade cords and rubber batons, black leather sequined jock straps, cockrings, sex in men's rooms, sex orgies in steam rooms, child pornography, homosexual weddings in Golden Gate Park with drag bridesmaids and quotations from "The Song of the Loon," hash, coke, Quaaludes, dressing like nuns and roller skating down Polk Street, and many other little diversions that the folks from Mattoon, Illinois have long believed standard San Francisco behavior.

Tales of the City is, in many ways, an extended San Francisco joke—an extension, for instance, of stories like "San Francisco is the only town where an invitation to an orgy arrives in an envelope marked Occupant"; "San Francisco is the only town with lipstick graffiti in the men's rooms"; "San Francisco is the only town where the Bicentennial Queen was a bisexual" and so forth. And if the book were only an extended joke I think I would find it a bit less tiresome. Unfortunately, though, *Tales of the City* elects to deliver a message—a message that has become monumentally tiresome: that "alienation"—e.g., homosexuality, hedonism, promiscuity—somehow is always preferable to "conformity"—heterosexuality, marriage, fidelity, self-sacrifice—because the former is "authentic," the latter, hypocritical. In short, it is the same message we've been getting from books, movies, TV and stage plays for decades; it is a message, to quote Irving Howe from *Decline of the New*, that's been around so long it's become "kitsch"; and it's a message that makes the reader want to raise, if not three, at least two cheers for hypocrisy.

Far removed from the hip, decadent worlds presented in the fictions of Mr. Maupin and Miss McFadden is the square, harsh but often beautiful world presented by Ivan Doig in his autobiography, *This House of Sky*[3]—a book that is remarkable in a number of ways. It is remarkably well written. Mr. Doig's lyrical talents are considerable and, like most first rate autobiographers, he seems to have the faculty of total recall. He remembers his mother, who died when he was six, as having a "frail and porcelain look" and a "dainty way of arching her head forward as if listening to a whisper." He remembers, with like clarity, the eyes of his stepmother, who never got on with his father. "Her eyes," he writes, "were large and softly brown with what seemed to be some hurt beginning to happen behind them—the deep trapped look of a doe the instant before she breaks for cover." He remembers the lusty speech and stories of the Montana sheep ranchers he was raised with. Of June mosquitoes: "Bastards're so big this year they can stand flatfoot and drink out of a rain barrel." Of a politician who has just won a debating point: "Had a grin on him like a jackass eatin' thistles." Of a dumb ranch hand: "Send him to fetch a bucket of water and he'll bring it back upside down." He remembers the palpable loneliness of the tiny Montana towns he and his itinerant ranch hand father lived in during the 1930s and '40s—towns where there were

[3] THIS HOUSE OF SKY, Landscapes of a Western Mind, by *Ivan Doig*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $9.95.

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no other children, towns of "50 persons, almost all of them undreamably old to me," towns like Ringling which consisted of "a gas station, a post office, Mike Ryan's store, the depot, and exactly through the middle of town, the railroad tracks which glinted and *fled* [my italics] instantly in both directions." And he remembers the fierce cold of the Montana winters—winters when he lived in a small drafty bungalow with his seventy-year-old grandmother—winters when "mewls of wind came sneaking under the sash" of his bedroom window and when, on some mornings after blizzards, the inside sill of that window would be covered with "tiny sifts white as spilled sugar."

More remarkable, though, than the quality of Mr. Doig's writing, is his ability to celebrate—without being sentimental or provincial or preachy—those traditional, middle class values which, as I said above, have taken such a drubbing for so long from the literary establishment: fidelity, self-sacrifice, hard work, deferred gratification, common sense, dependability, concern for the rights of others, desire for the good opinion of others, to mention a few. Though the characters Mr. Doig renders—especially those of his father and grandmother—are typically lower middle class in being suspicious of all pretentiousness, of all heroic posturing, they nevertheless emerge as heroic by embodying the above-mentioned values. They are heroic in the same way that some of the western characters in the early fictions of Wallace Stegner (that finest of novelists living in and writing about the American West) are heroic: to paraphrase one of Stegner's people, "Until an eastern writer explained to them that what they were doing was heroic, they had thought they were merely doing their duty."

Like *The Serial* and *Tales of the City* (both written to be serialized in the *San Francisco Chronicle*), *Endangered*,[4] by Barnaby Conrad and Niels Mortensen, is a rather meretricious little novel written to be filmed, and published in book form as a kind of advance publicity.

Endangered is the stock adventure story: hero and heroine, unarmed and lost, being pursued by villains through a wilderness; contrived characters, unlikely dialogue, numerous coincidences; some sex, lots of violence (à la *Deliverance*), including a gruesome crossbow slaying. Photographer David Brand and his editor-girl friend, Paige Evans, photographing the last (forty-nine) surviving American condors in a mountainous wilderness refuge east of Santa Barbara, run afoul of a vicious motorcycle gang dedicated to killing off the condors (a sinister corporation is behind it all). How the hero and heroine do away with the motorcyclists before the motorcyclists do away with them and the condors, is the story; and, as diversion, it's a good story.

Although not a work of fiction, John Fisher's *High Plains*,[5] an informal history of the High Plains of Texas (where Fisher was born and raised), is also a good story, more accurately, a good collection of stories. Mr. Fisher—ex-editor in chief of *Harper's* and long regarded as one of the shrewdest and sanest critics of the American scene—has brought together

[4] ENDANGERED, by *Barnaby Conrad* and *Niels Mortensen*. G. P. Putnam. $8.95.
[5] HIGH PLAINS, by *John Fisher*. Harper & Row. $10.00.

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his own sharp-eyed, sometimes grimly humorous (in the Mark Twain manner) recollections of the High Plains, coupled with stories told him by his family and by various old timers—stories he has checked whenever possible against the written record. Mr. Fisher writes about the well known and the not so well known. He writes about the legendary Colonel Charles Goodnight, first of the western cattlemen to create a ranching empire based on British money. He writes about Geronimo's last days at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and about Geronimo's magic blanket. Made "like a piece work quilt," Mr. Fisher relates, "out of white women's scalps—ninety nine of them," the blanket "was warm and fashionable . . . and the envy of every chief between the Gila River and the Arapaho country." But it "became a nuisance to keep well groomed on the march because of its tendency to collect sandburs and fleas." So, reluctantly, Geronimo was forced to retire the blanket for "magic uses only. When spread over a wounded brave it would heal him faster than rattlesnake oil or any other available medicine." And he writes about characters such as Apple Axe, a Texas bartender who had two glass eyes, one of normal appearance, the other colored red to match the color of his natural eye after evenings when he got carried away with his work.

One of the richest sources of wild west legend and lore, James D. Horan's *The Great American West*,[6] has recently been revised and expanded. Subtitled "A Pictorial History from Coronado to The Last Frontier," the new edition of Horan's classic work contains many new and rare photographs, government documents, frontier newspaper stories, drawings and pictures, and a splendid collection of the paintings of Charles Schreyvogel, the great painter-historian of the Indian Fighting Army of the American West. Mr. Horan has always been noted for writing about the wilder elements of the Wild West—gunfights, massacres, lynchings, outlaws, Indian chiefs—and his reputation will not be diminished by this new edition of *The Great American West*. Along with previously unpublished photographs and drawings, he provides much new information (a good bit of it debunking) on legendary events (Wounded Knee, for instance) and characters: Indian leaders like Cato, Red Cloud and Crazy Horse, and outlaws like Billy the Kid (Billy's fans will be distressed to learn that, according to Mr. Horan, Billy killed, not twenty-one men—one for each of the years he lived, as legend has it, but only three) and Kid Curry (Harvey Logan) who, Mr. Horan contends, though little celebrated, was clearly the most dangerous outlaw in the history of the Wild West. Hollywood script writers looking for new twists on oft told western tales should find Mr. Horan's book useful.

Carefully documented and complete in its coverage of most of San Francisco's history, John McGloin's *San Francisco: The Story of a City*[7] is, nevertheless, a book only the most dedicated San Franciscophiles will be able to finish. A Jesuit who has taught at the University of San Francisco for over thirty years, Father McGloin has done a thorough job of research

[6] THE GREAT AMERICAN WEST: A Pictorial History from Coronado to The Last Frontier (New Revised Edition), by *James D. Horan*. Crown Publishers. $14.95.

[7] SAN FRANCISCO: The Story of a City, by *John B. McGloin, S.J.* Presidio Press. $16.95.

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on "everyone's favorite city," but his writing is dull, dull, dull. Perhaps the main reason for its dullness is that, like a bad paragraph, it lacks subordination, which is to say, dramatic organization; and the total effect is that the book's characters and events all emerge as if they were to be regarded as of equal importance. The book also is awfully pedantic, as in its discussion of San Francisco's geography, specifically of the famous San Francisco hills. Is San Francisco really a city of hills? If so, of how many hills? What, indeed, is a hill? Aren't those things we've been calling hills all these years really only "conspicuous natural elevations"? And what of those "configurations" San Franciscans for so long have been calling mountains—Mt. Davidson, for example? Are they really mountains? I mean, do they really qualify as "lofty elevations of rock or earth, usually having a small summit area," and "standing singly or forming part of a series"?

Of the writing of books about San Francisco there is no end, and yet another book about "The City" is Charles Lockwood's *Suddenly San Francisco: The Early Years of An Instant City*.[8] Limited to the years between the 1849 Gold Rush and the 1906 earthquake, Mr. Lockwood's book, unlike Father McGloin's, is well written and interesting. San Francisco history buffs, however, will find much of its treatment of the seamier side of San Francisco's early history—prostitution, gambling, political corruption, vigilantism—repetitive of much that's already been done by the many writers belonging to the Barbary Coast Historical Writing Society.

[8] SUDDENLY SAN FRANCISCO: The Early Years of an Instant City, by *Charles Lockwood. San Francisco Examiner* Special Projects. $9.95.

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EDMUND L. KING

Cuadra in Translation

Songs of Cifar and the Sweet Sea began its life in English as a translation of thirty-four poems by Pablo Antonio Cuadra published in *The Hudson Review* (Vol. XXIX, No. 4, Winter 1976–77). It is now a book[1] containing those translations, by Grace Schulman, plus fourteen more poems. Also added is the name of a second editor and translator, Ann McCarthy de Zavala, responsible, I take it, for the occasional modifications of the first Schulman versions.

While many of the changes are arbitrary, a few are significant and direct our attention at once to a prime characteristic of Cuadra's poetry. Schulman, that is, has a tendency to elevation, which Zavala, I would guess, quite properly arrests, in as much as Cuadra cultivates flatness. He wants the characters' actions to speak louder than the poet's words, never meant to attract attention to themselves. Even the calculated simplicity of language and syntax avoids the appearance of calculation through jagged line lengths and unbalanced sentences. Metaphors are less frequent than they are in ordinary conversation, and when they are introduced they are marginal, as in the case of "The Birth of Cifar":

> There is an island in the shallows
> slender
> as the hand of an Indian God.
> It offers red fruit
> to the birds
> and, to the shipwrecked,
> the sweet shade of trees.
> There Cifar, the sailor,
> was born.
> His mother's time came
> as she rowed alone to Zapatera.
> She steered the boat to a pool
> while sharks and shad
> circled,
> drawn by the blood.

This, like the rest of the translations, is as close to the Spanish as you could possibly get, but the translators have thought it wise to turn "indígena" (*indigenous*) into "Indian" and thus to emphasize a trifle more Cuadra's implied feeling that he is himself *not* of the land, sympathetic as

[1] SONGS OF CIFAR AND THE SWEET SEA, by *Pablo Antonio Cuadra.* Selections from "Songs of Cifar, 1967–1977." Translated and edited by *Grace Schulman* and *Ann McCarthy de Zavala.* Spanish text facing. A Center for Inter-American Relations Book. Columbia University Press. $12.00; $5.95.

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he may be to those who are. What interests about the word, however, whether *Indian* or *indigenous,* is that it belongs to a metaphor marginal to the poem, as if the poet felt some obligation to bring the matter up while at the same time wishing to avoid elevation above the literal level. (Lost in translation is the abundant assonant rhyme—*pájaros, náufragos, árbol, navegante, madre, solitaria, remanso, aguas, sábalos, sangre*—which for me enhances the poetic quality not only here but in the several other poems where it is used.)

As the title indicates, the book is mostly about this Cifar, whose bloody afterbirth, I infer—Cuadra leaves an immense amount of the poetic intention to inference, a reason for acknowledging, perhaps, that the density of his work is greater than one is at first inclined to believe—has attracted sharks and shad. So firmly does Cuadra at once establish poetic asceticism as his principle that when we next encounter Cifar, leaving home against his mother's wishes, of course, we are almost disappointed to find the poet symbolizing at the end of the poem: "Once more a child/ left his mother's womb/ for the world."

To be sure, every now and then Cifar, *El Cachero,* leaves the stage to rest up, as it were, for what is to come, and we are given entr'acte poems about the untameable Nicaraguan nature that obviously fascinates the poet or little tableaux of manners and customs, such as "The Girls":

> The girls of the archipelago
> return from mass
> rowing
> like floating flowers
> like garlands
> in bright colors.
> Greet them
> from your island
> and you will raise a flight
> of fresh cries
> like birds.

If we take out the metaphors this time the poem collapses, and if in this case the clichés hardly seem worth saving at first, I find myself charmed in retrospect by the audacious simplicity with which Cuadra conveys his feeling that the *pueblo* emanates from Nicaraguan nature, which in turn necessarily belongs like a mother to its offspring. *Sandinista* sympathies are tacitly implied, in fact, throughout the book, and in two or three poems they are close enough to the surface to be visible, though if one doesn't have some notion of what has been going on in Nicaragua one may not recognize them right off. Indeed, one of the poems is dedicated to Ernesto Cardenal, much more than what the editors call Cuadra's friend. Ernesto (born in 1925) grew up like a son to Pablo Antonio, who is his cousin (born in 1912), according to what Cuadra has written elsewhere.

Songs of Cifar and the Sweet Sea is not a continuous or even by inference a coherent narrative. It is rather more on the order of the Spanish *romancero,* a collection of ballad-like poems, each about a striking episode or situa-

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tion and the whole held together by a community of characters among whom Cifar is the most prominent, as he sometimes is sung about and sometimes sings for himself. We have seen him born and leaving home. Here is the rest of his story as it can be abstracted from the songs:

> Cifar goes after a girl in red he has seen across the water on another island, but she will not come to him. He takes up with Eufemia, but becomes the object of her fury and flees by boat, only to be caught in a storm that is even worse than the girl he has left. Under the evening star, Cifar looks out upon Inés's island, everywhere in flames, as Inés, herself afire, runs naked into the waters. Angelina fights Cifar tooth and nail, only to gaze after him with gratitude as he sails away into a storm. Because his (borrowed) boat, *The Siren,* is faster than the boats of his pursuers, Cifar is able to abduct Fidelia. With that episode behind him, he drops anchor at the island of another girl, unnamed, and finds everything there the same except that the girl is gone. Cifar takes Ubaldina to wife and onto a boat, and, while the crew topside struggles against the storm, that very night down in the cabin he puts an end to Ubaldina's virginity as he begets Rugel (for unfathomable reasons written Rugél by Cuadra). His life as a fisherman imperiled by the treacheries of nature goes on, and one day Eufemia writes him to come back to her; but for him that adventure is over. Eventually, though, Eufemia does get him back, and this escapade lands him in jail (for a while). Cifar is on the side of the rebels (not named), to whom he ferries fish and arms. Tomás is tortured to death because he won't tell who carried the weapons. Cifar rescues a drowning woman, Mirna, whose nipples, trembling by the light of the moon, he will never forget. He yearns to see Fidelia and his son, now grown. Because he knows that Mirna, the prostitute, is waiting for him across the water, he defies a storm and goes to her. The news circulates that Cifar the Harpist (another attribute) is in jail because of a brawl over a woman. Eufemia will have none of him; Fidelia is far away; his mother is dead. Mirna escapes from the brothel and brings him food. On a happier occasion, Corpus Christi, Cifar laughs at himself for weeping as twelve maidens in white, among them his daughter Ubaldina, row past in a nautical procession. He prays that his daughter may have a peaceful life in a fishing cove. Cifar disappears, his only epitaph an oar floating on the water. (The interspersed vaticinations by the Master of Tarca strike me as distracting, superfluous, and tedious.)

The Spanish in which this is versified is, except for the easily understood vulgarism *calmura* (calm, on the lake) and the name of a local water hen, *piche,* general basic Castilian so delocalized that the characters invariably address each other as *tú,* never as *vos,* the usual form of address in popular Nicaraguan speech. If there is poetry—and I think there is much—in Cuadra's completely accessible original, much of that poetry, according to Cuadra's own premises, is surely present in Schulman's and Zavala's translation, almost entirely free of errors.

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But almost entirely is not entirely. Cifar's alias "El Cachero" is rendered as "The Cockroach," "to capture the sound of *El Cachero*," which, we are informed by "Z.," is "a nickname without any literal meaning." Piffle. The right kind of dictionary will explain that *cachero* is a Central-Americanism with three different meanings: full of lies; hard-working; importunate. With so much information available, one would expect to draw from the poems themselves the sense in which Cuadra is using the word, and, following that procedure, I conclude, with no great conviction, to be sure, that we are reading about Cifar Guevara, the Hustler—somewhat as the word is used in baseball. Another misapprehension: "river carpenter" is the translation of "carpintero de ribera." In spite of appearances, *ribera* does not mean "river" but "shore" or "bank," and the precise English equivalent of the Spanish phrase is "boatwright." There are a few more such mistakes.

Amateurishness is more noticeable in the introduction (by Grace Schulman) and the notes, glossary, and bibliography (by Ann McCarthy de Zavala), both in the infelicities of expression ("The poetry *incarnates* [Cuadra's] dream of an autonomous Nicaragua," a rare example of the flesh made word, or, for an example of something else, the explanation of "Hijueputeando" as a "common *swear word*"), and in the vapidities offered by way of elucidating Cuadra's classicism and Nicaraguanism. Any poet who isolates for his subject man and his struggle with raw nature is going to see and set down analogues of what other poets, including the Greeks, have seen and set down, and anyone, including the poet himself, will recognize such analogues to the degree that his literary culture allows. The culture of very few readers would bring to their minds Lycophron's *Alexandra* (not, as Zavala would have it, *Alexandria*), which Cuadra is evidently hipped on. Like the editors, I have neither the Latin nor the Greek to comment intelligently on this whole matter, but I can tell from a perusal of the *Cassandra* (i.e., the *Alexandra*: both titles were used) in the Loeb Classics that Lycophron was among the worst poets ever to use the Greek language. "The obscurity of [*Cassandra*]," my Smith's dictionary confirms, "is proverbial." What a pleasure it is to return from Lycophron the opaque to Pablo Antonio Cuadra the transparent. In this timely and engaging book of songs, Cuadra introduces us to some of Nicaragua's real people in poetry of compelling simplicity and directness.

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DORE J. LEVY

Mysteries and Solutions

The Genesis of Secrecy[1] is based on Frank Kermode's recent lectures as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor at Harvard University. This is not the first time the British-born critic—the King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge University—has given his views on literature an American airing. A previous series of public lectures, delivered at Bryn Mawr College in 1965, resulted in *The Sense of an Ending*,[2] his first developed study of theory of narrative and reader response. *The Genesis of Secrecy* reflects similar interests. It also echoes the issues of a later work, *The Classic*,[3] in which Kermode examined the progress of an established work of literature in a changing society.

The Genesis of Secrecy contains six essays dealing with the interpretation of narrative texts. The essays explore the impact of interpretation on the reader; specifically, the significance of obscure passages in a text as they affect the reader's understanding of the text. While the matter of Kermode's inquiry focuses on the Gospels, the possibilities of esoteric meaning are by no means confined to sacred texts. The literary establishment demands a similar reverence for its approved works of literature, and in this realm Kermode examines the works of a wide range of modern authors: Franz Kafka, Henry Green, Thomas Pynchon, Henry James, and James Joyce.

The first essay states the fundamental issue of the book: a reader, seeking to interpret narrative, must be supremely aware of the difference between *secrets*, and *Secrecy*. Secrets are problems within a given text which call for individual interpretive solutions. Secrecy, on the other hand, is a thing in itself, a style which underlies an entire work of literature. It is not a finite problem and, as such, does not have a particular solution. The danger of confusion for the reader is in the fundamental ambivalence between secrets and Secrecy. A problem for interpretation is posed in a narrative by the statement of any particular secret or enigmatic figure in the text. The existence of particular secrets flows from the underlying concept of Secrecy. The reader is in danger of confusing the solution of a particular secret with the penetration of Secrecy itself.

This may explain an essential difference between literature and, say, detective fiction. Detective fiction poses a series of secrets for the stimulation of the reader, to be resolved either by the reader or in the narrative material of the plot itself. If the reader does not conclude that the butler did it by following the author's clues, one of the author's own agents in the plot will reveal the solution. If the secrets in a work of detective fiction

[1] THE GENESIS OF SECRECY: On the Interpretation of Narrative, by *Frank Kermode.* Harvard University Press. $10.00.

[2] New York, 1967.

[3] New York, 1975.

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are not solved by the denouement, the work is a failure. All details must be neatly integrated and solved. The reader of detective fiction must find a solution, not impenetrable Secrecy. What is a failure for detective fiction, however, is a triumph for literature. Literature aspires to Secrecy, which is an underlying fact not only of art, but of life.

Although his book depends on this distinction from the first, Kermode actually formulates it best in his final essay, "The Unfollowable World":

> We are most unwilling to accept mystery, what cannot be reduced to other and more intelligible forms. Yet that is what we find here: something irreducible, therefore perpetually to be interpreted; not secrets to be found out one by one, but Secrecy.

The four middle essays develop a variety of approaches to Secrecy and the problems of interpretation. The second essay is a *cri du coeur* of the reader in general and of the literary critic in particular. A reader's awareness of the presence of Secrecy determines his position as an "insider," a reader of the "spiritual" senses of a work of literature. Those readers who perceive only the literal level of the text are bound to what Kermode terms "carnal" senses—the state in which a text is accepted to mean what it says and say what it means. The reader of "spiritual" senses must master the "carnal" senses of a narrative before he can determine if the content depends on more than narrative detail for its significance. And in so comprehending he must accept that he can never comprehend fully.

The literary critic should obviously be a reader of "spiritual" senses. His agony is that because of his awareness of the role of Secrecy in literature, he knows that he can never perform his function adequately. The perfect function of a critic would be to eliminate all mystery about a text. But we know that impenetrable Secrecy underlies a work of art, and so the critic must ultimately fail. Critics endlessly attempt to construct perfect and complete interpretations of works of literature, even hopelessly obscure or corrupt ones. The fact that two critics may produce consistent, intelligible, but utterly different and even conflicting interpretations of a single work is evidence of the impossibility of fulfillment. Nevertheless, generation after generation will renew the attempt, because the enigmatic radiance of mysterious details is too seductive, and too hopeful to be resisted:

> There are modern critics who think our desire for the well-formed—or our wish to induce well-formedness where it is not apparent—is in bad faith. They hold that it is more honest to experience deception, disappointment in our encounters with narrative. They have not yet prevailed; we are in love with the idea of fulfillment, and our interpretations show it.

This plight of the critic as Tantalus is developed in the third essay. Kermode uses unexplained figures from James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Gospel of St. Mark to illustrate the frustration. The "man in the macin-

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tosh" (from *Ulysses*) and the "boy in the shirt" (from the Gospel) are not just part of the text's secret meaning, but also part of the author's secret plot or intention. There is rarely, if ever, such a thing as coincidence in literature. What appears to be coincidence is inevitably the work of the author. Therefore, the impulse of the reader is inevitably to impose some sort of literal logic upon the enigmatic figure or coincidence in relation to the plot. If the reader is in pursuit of narrative consistency, the solution of one mystery limits the range of possibilities of the next one, and so on to a "logical" end. But if, on the basis of expectations raised through interpretation, the ending of a narrative should prove non-logical, non-justifiable, the reader has three choices. He can think again, and assume that he has taken a wrong turning in his tracking of mysteries and solutions. He can fault the author of the text as careless or lacking in vision. Or he can accept his lack of fulfillment as an actual part of the function of the narrative, as his encounter with Secrecy, which can be divined but never penetrated.

The fourth essay, "Necessities of Upspringing," discusses how the interpretation of a character or the motives of a given action can generate different meanings. Vladimir Propp's classic study, *The Morphology of the Folktale*,[4] used examples from a group of Russian folktales to propose a theory which organized narrative into units of action, each unit corresponding to a particular function of the plot. Characters in any given narrative were treated as a natural outgrowth of their function in the plot as a whole. Because a certain character functions as the hero in a given plot, he will have certain traits and attributes of character appropriate to his function. Authors add their perceptions and interpretations of character to a plot not by providing commentary, but by augmenting the action of the narrative with details which in turn influence the characters. Conversely, an original concept of a character can generate an entire plot to contain it. This was the basis of Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1906):

> First [James] thinks of a presumptuous girl affronting her destiny. Only then can he get on to the business of "Organizing an ado about Isabel Archer."

In some cases, it may be impossible to determine the original source of a mysterious character or action. Kermode uses the evolution of the figure of Judas in the Gospels as an example of this complication. Judas' narrative function is that of the Betrayer. However, the reader's (and the author's) sense of coherence demands that Judas have a motive for his action. The addition of personal details makes the explanation that "Satan entered into him" acceptable on the human level. As the character becomes more explicit, the fable becomes more complex. Judas' character is justified because of his function as the Betrayer. The need of the narrative for an agent to effect the preliminary downfall necessary to the final tri-

[4] Translated by L. Scott. Bloomington, 1958.

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umph of Jesus is the motivation for the creation of a Judas. Judas himself personifies the paradox of interpretation's demand for sense:

> Depending on how one looks at it, [Judas] plays the role of Helper or Opponent; by opposing the hero he serves the logic of the narrative, as Satan did in Job. Satan's name means "adversary" or "opponent"; so here, when, as Luke and John report, he entered into Judas, we have a case of a character being possessed by his narrative role. Of course by opposing he helps; his evil act, like Satan's, is permissive, ultimately a means to the good.

The fifth essay, "What Precisely Are the Facts?", deals with historical narrative. The Gospels are, after all, didactic. Not only are they intended to give a coherent and convincing narrative, but their authors intended them to be transparent on historical fact. The discrepancies between the four accounts of the career of Jesus reveal the impossibility of realizing this intention. Kermode demonstrates that while the ideal of history is to have no Secrecy, historical narrative does indeed confront the same ambiguities and ambivalences as narrative fiction. Conversely, one of the ideals of literature, in spite of the importance of interpretation and Secrecy, is clarity. A novel may reflect the aspirations of historical writing in that it adopts the authority we confer on history by presenting itself as a document of the real world. But the gaps with empirical truth are there, insistent upon interpretation and threatening the reader with bafflement.

Kermode's purpose in studying the nature of interpretation is not merely literal exegesis in the tradition of philological or Biblical criticism. The interpretation of a textual inconsistency, a pun, or a seemingly arcane detail is not really valuable in itself, but rather as it helps to inspire a sense of the text as a whole. Kermode's exploration offers some stimulating insights to the possibilities; but even as he reveals the excitements of "secret senses," he seems disconsolate about the impossibility of final satisfaction, of any ultimate or "right" interpretation of a text.

It would seem that Kermode is a victim of his own subtlety. In his concluding essay, his view seems to be that Secrecy is not only an essential component of literature, but an essential fact of life. How much can we know from our subjective, time-bound positions, and how can we bear the uncertain knowledge of unknowable possibilities? Kermode laments his glimpse of the infinity of possibilities, even in literature. But this "unfollowable world" may not be an object of despair only. From our discussion of the nature of narrative, we can see it is foolish to try to separate what Kermode calls the "carnal" and "spiritual" senses of a text. The "spiritual" senses cannot, in fact, exist without reference to the literal level of the text. The text is in itself the manifestation of Secrecy, and our only concrete avenue of contact with it. Therefore, we must ultimately return to the "carnal" sense of a narrative as significant in its own right, otherwise the artifact would never have been created in the first place. The "insider" may even benefit from accepting his limitations on occasion. Leopold Bloom conceded to the infinity of "spiritual" senses in his

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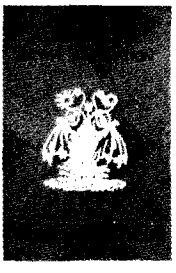

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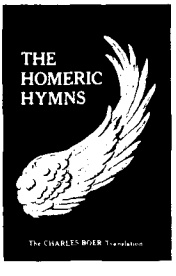

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own story and accepted the carnal needs of getting on with life: he took himself off to bed. The "door of disappointment" shut on Secrecy may be, for our world, a threshold of possibility.

For a reader committed to a certain ideology of interpretation, *The Genesis of Secrecy* may be a frustrating book. Kermode's very real involvement with his primary materials, Gospel and novel alike, give the book the character of a personal, even spiritual, quest. Kermode's own methods demonstrate his point about the extreme subjectivity of interpretation. As it stands, *The Genesis of Secrecy* is a provocative study of the role of interpretation in the creation of a work of literature, and its continuing role in the life of a text through time. The presentation could be smoother: although one could not very well treat the six essays as independent units, they reflect their origin as a series of public lectures in a way that detracts somewhat from their underlying unity of theme. The patches of stylistic informality do not relieve the difficult nature of the material. Nevertheless, it provides even stubbornly "carnal" readers with a suggestion of the power of insight inspired by an obscure narrative. We may also add an admonition for "spiritual" readers: dear Bloom may have been quite right.

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